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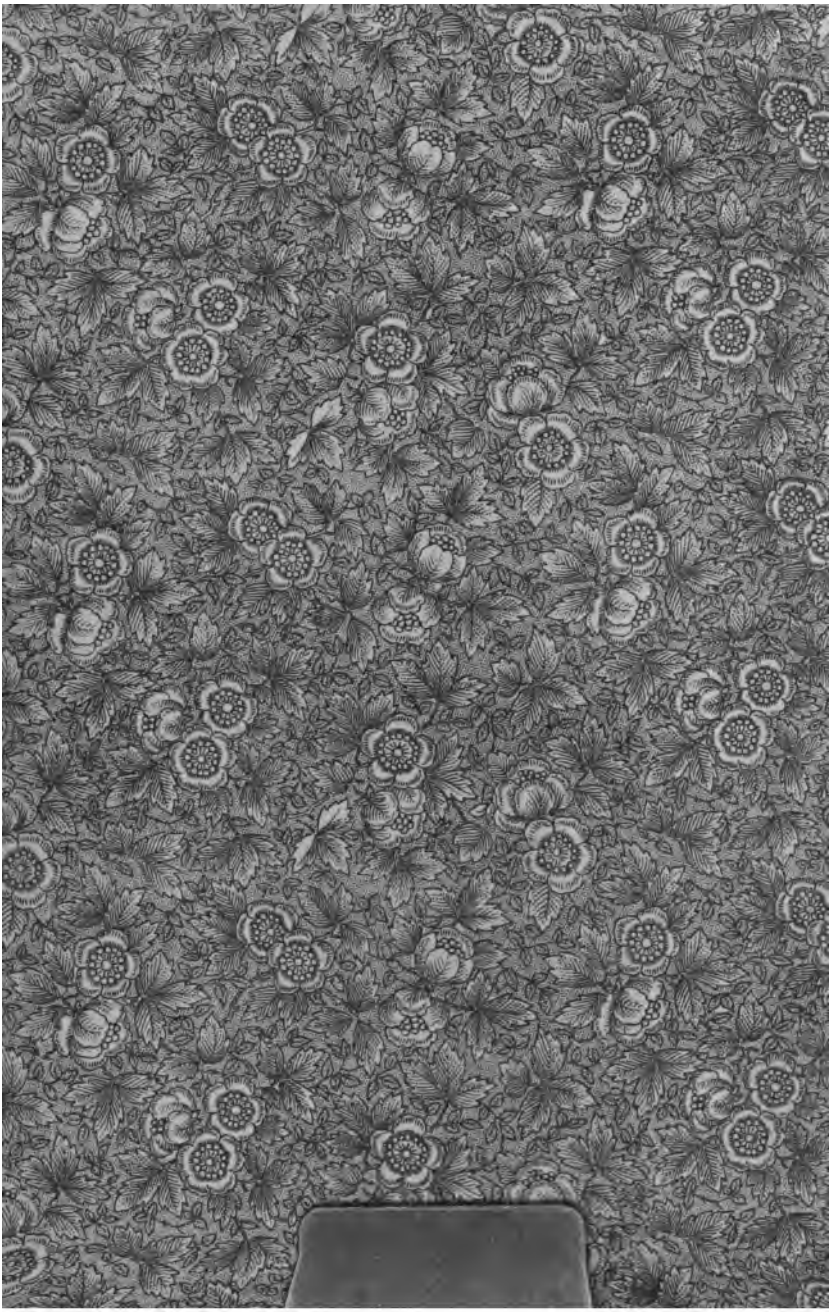
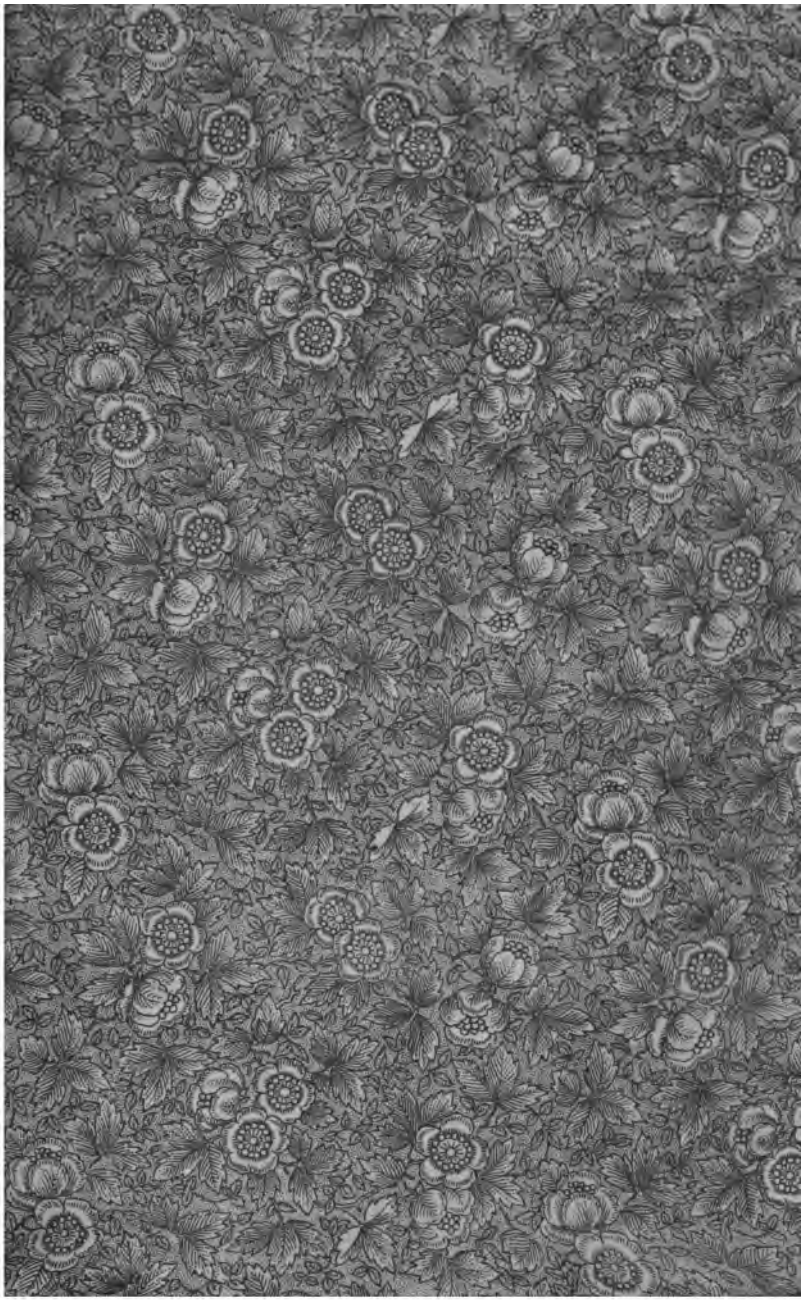
How They Loved Him

by

Florence Marryat





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HOW THEY LOVED HIM.

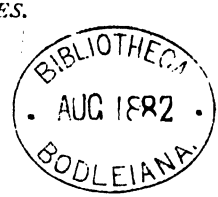
A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT
(MRS FRANCIS LEAN).

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HOW THEY LOVED HIM.

CHAPTER I.

FOR EVER.

'It is the same together or apart,
From life's commencement to its slow decline:
We are entwined; let death come slow or fast,
The tie which bound the first endures the last.'

Byron.

TO describe the feelings of Fenella Barrington at this period would be almost impossible. Not because no one has ever felt so deeply as she did, but because such thoughts are not to be adequately portrayed in black and

white. Arraigned before the judgment of the world, they would appear foolish, romantic, overstrained, and perhaps culpable; to each individual heart alone, according to the circumstances under which they found it, must they answer for the consequences. Fenella's heart was in an exceptional condition when the passion of love overtook and conquered it. In the first place, she was very young; and youth, like charity, 'believeth all things and hopeth all things.' She was too ignorant of human nature to doubt its truth—too ignorant of life to distrust its possibilities. And in the second place, she was very lonely and unhappy. She had no watchful parent to shield her innocence; she had not even any one to call her to account for her actions. She was free as the air, unguarded as the birds that flew in it, unloved as the most friendless waif that was ever forsaken by its natural protectors.

Disappointed and alone! What girl

under such circumstances could be expected not to answer with the whole strength of her nature to the call of love? Her heart was so empty of affection—it yearned so for it—that it would not have been strange had she succumbed to the appeal of any fellow-creature who desired to show her kindness—least of all to that of Geoffrey Doyne. For there was a fascination about him that was far above any physical attractions he may have possessed—a fascination which every woman felt who crossed his path, and many were left to rue. His tender eyes, and sensitive mouth, and dreamy poetical nature made him appear the most sympathetic and warm-hearted of human creatures; as indeed he was—whilst the humour lasted. But there were two formidable foes in his breast to war against his better feelings, and usually to overcome them, and these were a want of moral courage and a great love of self.

Geoffrey Doyne generally wanted to do

right, and, as a rule, he generally did wrong. His head told him the proper thing to do, but his heart failed him at the very moment he called upon it for support and courage. So he was the worst possible guide that could have been found for a young and susceptible girl who loved him ardently.

Fenella would have proved far the most trustworthy of the two. Her innocence made her the better fitted to lead the way, had she not loved him so blindly as to be incapable of believing him to be in the wrong.

The reverend mother had said of her to Eliza Bennett, 'She possesses the most dangerous attributes with which a young girl can encounter the world,—a heart so large and warm and generous, that where it loves it cannot see a fault, and a strong resolute nature that will act on its own impulses against all conventionality or advice.' And the reverend mother was right. Fenella was that most

dangerous combination — a child in experience, and a woman in feeling. In her eyes Geoffrey Doyne was simply perfection; and from the day he said he loved her, she yielded herself up to his control in everything. She looked on him rather as a god than a man. She could not understand how it was that so perfect a creature condescended to dwell amongst ordinary mortals. The air he breathed, the flower he touched, the ground he trod on became sacred to her from mere contact with him. Hers was not the frivolous, giggling, open-mouthed admiration of a school-girl; it was the silent, awe-struck adoration of a woman! She would sit for hours absorbed in the contemplation of his features. Each movement of his supple figure was a poem to her, each tone of his voice a melody, each glance from his eyes a dream of heaven. She hung upon his words as if they had been inspired; and his touch, however careless, had the power to thrill her with

a pleasure that was next door to pain. A few days of intimate communion, of mutually-confessed and openly-avowed passion, made Geoffrey Doyne her ruler —her inspiration—her very life.

And he knew it but too soon. He saw that the girl had become his slave—morally and physically; that he had but to lift his little finger to command her obedience; that with a glance of his eye he could direct her actions or sway her mind. And he loved her for it in return. Let him have justice done him at this, the fairest portion of his life. There is no question that *he loved her!* Although he was not sufficiently heroic, nor high-minded, nor courageous to rank her purity and child-like trust in him above his own selfish gratification—although his religion was not potent enough to gain the mastery over the more natural religion of love—still *he loved her!* Fenella was the first woman who had ever touched his heart, as he was the first man who had

ever attempted to win hers. Her face was not more charming, perhaps, than many he had met with before; her talents (if of a high order) were crude and undeveloped; her love for himself, though deep and glowing, was no more than he had a right to expect from the other sex. But she was the first whom he had ever loved; and there is a magic charm in those words, *the first.* The first kiss, the first woman, the first child, the first disappointment, the first death! Can any future joy or sorrow equal these? They are events that stand alone in our lives: they can never be repeated; once gone, they are gone for ever! In all the rest of his life, though Geoffrey Doyne might love a dozen other women, and swear a thousand oaths of fidelity to them, he would never love *in the same way* he loved Fenella Barrington. More, he would never feel the passion of love in his breast, even though it burned ten times as strongly as it burned for her, without giving one short,

quick sob of remembrance to the girl who gave him her whole heart, and placed her very life in his hands, upon the sands of Ines-cedwyn! And if he could forget—if his mortal nature proved so weak—Heaven is still above us all, watching, noting, jotting down on tablets of stone each crime we commit against the heart of a fellow-creature, to hold them up before our eyes to all eternity. The time will come when we shall be unable to forget!

After the day on which they discovered their mutual affection, Fenella Barrington and Geoffrey Doyne met, if possible, more frequently than they had done before. Each morning found them on the sands together, or if the young man pleaded an unwelcome engagement with his sisters, it was only to impress upon Fenella the double obligation of meeting him when the evening shadows should have fallen on the landslip. Ah! those dangerous moments spent beneath the soft

veil of dusk—when they sat side by side upon the golden sands, and watched the stars come out upon the summer sky, and their fresh, young voices rose up in unison to heaven in the thrilling notes of some love melody, or the more solemn tones of an evening hymn; when their hands lay fast locked in one another's, and Fenella's head was pillowed on her lover's breast, till she heard no sound but the throbbing of his heart answering to her own. And they talked of the future—that glorious and apparently certain future, when they should always be together, and have no need to steal out, under cover of the evening, to meet each other on the sands.

It was provoking that, as yet, Geoffrey had been unable to write to Mrs Barrington and make a formal proposal for her daughter's hand, because but one letter had been received from that lady, dated from Genoa, and averring the intention of her party to move about for

a few weeks in the South before they settled down in Mentone. But that was of little consequence—so the lovers told each other—because as soon as Mrs Barrington *was* settled, Geoffrey would go over and see her, which would be far better than writing—and they could not be happier than they were.

It was now the end of June; two months had slipped away in this sweet courtship, and every day might bring the letter to say that Fenella's mother was settled at Mentone.

Eliza Bennett was up and about again. She had even discarded the crutches with which Dr Redfern had provided her, but her leg was still stiff, and she had not yet ventured to walk as far as the beach. But some rumours had reached her ears of the company in which her young mistress so constantly indulged. Of course the boat and fishermen had seen the courtship from the beginning. Tugwell, who had so often to put up at the public

house, would have told them of it if they had not had eyes to see it for themselves. But it was nobody's business to carry the news up to Benjamin Bennett's cottage. If the young lady liked to amuse herself, what was the odds to Ines-cedwyn? besides, Eliza Bennett was ailing, and there was no need to worry her with a parcel of tales about nothing. So the men told the women to hold their tongues, and consequently it was some time before anybody spoke of Fenella's doings out of their own circle.

But when Eliza Bennett had so far recovered as to be in the garden, and Martha had more time for gossiping with her neighbours, they let their tongues loose, and asked her to satisfy their curiosity with regard to the handsome stranger that came over to Ines-cedwyn in his boat every day, and if he was going to marry the young lady from the cottage who sat for so many hours with him in the Beach Bungalow. Of course it was

all news to Martha, and she ran open-mouthed with it to her sister-in-law.

'Only to think, 'Liza,' she exclaimed, 'what Winny Williams has just told me! Miss Fenella's got a beau, and such a fine lookin' feller too. They've bin meetin' each other at that there nasty ruined bungalow for weeks past, and having fine times, I warrant. Tugwell says the gentleman lives at Lynwern, but he's not sure as he's got his name properly. Only to think of your young lady! Well, sooner or later they all does it.'

Eliza Bennett was at first incredulous.

'I don't believe it,' she replied; 'the Ines-cedwyn folk must talk of something. I daresay Miss Fenella may have exchanged a word or two with the gentleman on the sands; but as for havin' a *beau*, why, Martha, she's that innercent, she don't know what it means! She'd run away more likely if any one were to say more than "good-day" to

her. You don't know my young lady; she's the biggest child of her age I ever saw.'

'Is she, now?' replied Martha meditatively. 'Well, I should have said the same myself when she first come here; but d'ye know, 'Liza, she's a deal changed lately—more fidgety like, and don't eat hearty, and allays a-jumpin' up and down from her seat, with her colour comin' and goin' like a flame o' fire. Ben ain't very far seein' as a rule, but he told me only last week as he thought there was somethin' up with her.'

'Why didn't you tell me before?' exclaimed her sister-in-law, in evident distress.

'Why! what would ha' been the good o' that—a' worryin' you for nothin' when you're ill?'

'But I'd have spoken to Miss Fenella, and found out the truth of it, Martha. For she's one of the best young ladies you ever see; she's like a lamb for obe-

dience, and I'm sure she'd no more go to do the thing that is wrong than she'd fly!'

'Who said she had?' cried Martha. 'Lor' bless my heart, 'Liza! leave the poor child alone. If she *is* having a bit of fun with the young feller, what harm? There's little enough to amuse her down here, I'm sure, and she'll be all the better for it. You wouldn't go and spoil her game by makin' a fuss over it, would you?'

'No; not if there's no harm, Martha; certainly not! but, you see, Miss Fenella's very young and easily led, and there's no knowing what a gentleman might get to say to her, seeing she's so pretty, I must say I do distrust 'em, one and all; and my mistress would never forgive me if any harm came to the young lady.'

'Lor', 'Liza! how you do run on,' said Martha. 'I shall be sorry I said anything about it next. Ain't a pretty girl like that never to have a sweetheart? and

what harm do you think could come to her with a real gentleman? He'll only tell her a few lies, and she'll be none the worse for 'em; so don't you go and fret over it now, or you'll make yourself ill again.'

Eliza promised she would not; but she could not dismiss the subject from her mind, for her dread of Mrs Barrington's possible anger made her imagine all sorts of danger to the girl under her charge.

'If it hadn't been for this stupid leg,' she thought to herself, 'I'd have been everywhere with Miss Fenella, and no one couldn't have spoken to her without my knowledge. And now Martha comes to speak of it, there has been a great change in her lately. She's more excited and forgetful like; and sometimes she's as gay as a lark, and at others I've seen her staring up at the sky with the tears on her face, and yet with a smile on her mouth. There's something very strange about it all. How can I have

been so stupid as not to see it before! But this leg has put everything else clean out of my head.'

It was past nine o'clock when this conversation took place, and Fenella had gone down to the beach as usual, about an hour before. Under the new point of view from which she now regarded her young lady's wanderings, Eliza Bennett grew fidgety at her absence.

'I wonder what she's about this evening?' she thought presently. 'It's too dark to see anything on the beach at this time o' night, and Miss Fenella must know that supper's ready and waiting for her. I wonder if I could manage to get as far as the bungalow. I've a good mind to try; and I sha'n't feel easy now if I don't look a bit more after her.'

Martha had gone to assist her husband in the cowyard, and there was no one to combat Eliza's desire, or tell her it was foolish to attempt to do so much.

So she put on her bonnet and shawl, and taking a stick in her hand, commenced to hobble slowly in the direction of the beach.

Meanwhile Fenella and Geoffrey stood together in one of the rooms of the ruined villa. They were looking serious, but scarcely sad. Hope and trust were too strong in them for sadness.

'Oh, Geoffrey,' Fenella was saying, 'is it true? Must you really go?'

'I am afraid I must, my darling. I have received a most imperative letter from my brother Michael (that's the lawyer, you know, Fenella), urging me to go up to town and see him at once, on the most important business. I can't imagine what it is—something to do with money, I suppose. I don't think Michael would call anything else "important;" but, any way, I must go, and I shall start to-morrow morning.'

'And when will you be back, Geoffrey?'

'As soon as ever I can, my darling; you may rest assured of that. And meanwhile,

I shall write to you every day. What will old Bennett say when she sees the letters?'

'Never mind Bennett! She may be surprised, but she will not attempt to interfere with them. She is only my servant, Geoffrey. You do not suppose I would allow her to come between you and me?'

'Dear me! What an independent young woman you have grown! Who would imagine this was the same little girl that blushed scarlet each time I looked at her but two short months ago?'

'You have made me a woman,' said the girl with one of the scarlet blushes he alluded to. 'I feel now as if I should have courage to stand up against the whole world if it attempted to come between me and the love you bear me.'

'You shall never be put to the test, my Fenella. Nothing shall ever divide our love. I wish to goodness that letter would come from your mother, and then the matter would be settled.'

'And if—if she should be angry, and

refuse her consent to our marriage?' faltered the girl.

'Then we are to be married without her consent—is it not so? Why, Fenella! do you think any earthly power could divide us now?'

She clung to him with a force that was almost painful.

'Oh no, no! how could it? But, Geoffrey, I wish—oh, how I wish!—that we could have been married before you went to London.'

'My sweetheart, so do I. There is nothing I long for more than the day when we shall go to church and do all that dreadful "swearing" you are so afraid of. Only, I am afraid it must not be in Lynwern. It would not be fair to you, nor your mother, nor any one, Fenella. Let me write to her first, darling; it cannot be long now before you hear again; and then if she raises any objection (which I think most unlikely), I shall not hesitate a moment to carry you straight off before her eyes and marry you in the first church

we come to. So be patient, my love, and trust to me, and all will be right by-and-by.'

'And nothing—*nothing* shall ever divide us?' she repeated, still clinging to him.

'Nothing, *so help me, God!*' he answered. And that oath was registered in heaven, and remains there to this day.

They sat together on one of the window-sills for some time longer, with their arms interlaced and their heads close together, talking such sweet nonsense as the world laughs at because it has no heart to understand, but which makes up the sum of happiness in this mortal life.

'And what am I to send my darling from London?' demanded Geoffrey. 'In all this time I have not given you one present, because there was nothing worthy of you in Lynwern; but now you must have something to remind you of your lover. What shall it be, sweetheart?—a locket or a ring?'

'I don't want anything,' she said bashfully, 'but *you*.'

'Oh, you've got me fast enough, my child,' he answered, laughing; 'but come now, answer my question. Will you have a ring?'

She shook her head.

'No; not till you give me *that one*, Geoffrey.'

'That won't be long first, my darling! You'll be wanting to get it off again twelve months afterwards—you'll be so sick of it and me.'

'Don't—*don't!*' she murmured, as if smitten by a sudden pain.

'May I send you a locket, then, Mrs Doyne?' he continued playfully, for he saw her spirits were sinking; 'a great big gold locket to put your husband's hair in, and sleep with under your pillow every night until you see him again—for I know that is what you silly girls do when you've got a lover.'

At this proposal her face brightened.

'Yes; I should like to have a locket —very, *very* much, dear Geoffrey; and

I will wear it as long as ever I live.'

Then he rose suddenly, and said that he must go.

'Past ten o'clock, I declare, my dearest, and I have to be up at eight. God bless you, my Fenella! God keep you for me! Oh, this parting is an awful wrench, though it is but for so short a time.'

The girl did not say much, but her face went suddenly as white as a sheet, and she clung to him as though her arms would never be unlocked again.

'You will come back soon?' she whispered, trembling like a leaf.

'Very, very soon—in a week at latest—most likely in a couple of days. Don't shake so, my darling! remember we are pledged to each other for life. Surely, Fenella, you have not one doubt of me?'

'*I trust you as I trust God*,' she answered solemnly. They were her last words—their farewells had been exchanged already; in another moment he had broken

from her clasp, and was gone. Fenella watched him as he strode across the sands and pushed off in the little boat that was waiting for him. She kissed her hand in the moonlight again and again, but he was too far off to see the signal; then, with a sound that was half a sob and half a sigh, she turned away. As she did so she saw something glittering on the dusty floor—something lying in a streak of moonlight shone like a diamond beneath her feet. It was one of Geoffrey's sleeve-links that had fallen from his cuff as he embraced her—a twisted thing of enamel and gold that Fenella had often noticed on his wrist before. With a cry of joy she pounced upon it, and hid it in her bosom. She did not know till that moment how much she could prize anything that had been his; she could not realise how bitter separation between those who love, can be, till she had tasted it. As she prepared to return to the cottage, a dark figure in the doorway of the bungalow made her start.

'Bennett!' she exclaimed, in the same moment, 'is that you? Oh, how you frightened me! I never supposed for a moment you could get down so far. But how you are shaking! I am sure it has been too much for you.'

'Miss Fenella,' said the servant, as she sat down on the verandah floor to recover herself, 'I came to see after you, my dear! Do you know as it's past ten o'clock, and the supper's been on the table this hour and more? It's too late for a young lady to be out by herself, and in such a lonely place as Ines-cedwyn.'

'Why, nurse, I thought its loneliness was the very thing that made it safe. This is not the first evening I have been on the sands till ten o'clock, and Martha never spoke to me on the subject, or told me I was wrong.'

'No, Miss Fenella; 'tisn't Martha's business to speak to you; and I've been in bed, you see, and knew nothin' about it; but I'm afraid as your mamma wouldn't

think it was right. And—if I may make so bold, miss—who was that gentleman who parted with you just as I came up to the back of the house?'

Fenella was startled by the question, but she was too proud to attempt to deny the truth.

'That was a friend of mine, Bennett—a gentleman who often comes over to Inescedwyn. You need not worry yourself about him. It is all right, and mamma will say so, too, as soon as she hears it.'

'Is he a friend of your mamma's, miss?'

'Yes; that is, he doesn't know her yet, but he soon will. He is the friend of all of us, nurse—the very best friend we ever had.'

'I am glad of that, my dear; but I hope he won't come here again till he's seen your mamma. Because it isn't quite the proper thing, you know, for a gentleman to meet a young lady so often, and at all sorts of odd times. It makes people talk, Miss Fenella, and that's not good for any one.'

What was it in the girl's face that made the servant half afraid of saying even as much as she did? A new light, a new dignity, something she had never seen there before, seemed to settle on Fenella's brow, and relegate Eliza Bennett to her proper position. She could not speak to her young mistress now as she had done on the journey from Calais to Dover.

'Bennett,' said the girl presently, 'I daresay it may seem strange to you, because you do not understand; neither can I give you any explanation till I have seen my mother. But you may make your mind easy on one score—the gentleman has gone away, for the present. He will not be back again, most probably, until we have heard from Mentone; and then everything will be right. And now, let me take you home, dear nurse. I wish you hadn't come down here after me; I am so afraid you may have hurt yourself. There! lean on my arm as hard as ever you like; you cannot tire me; and we will go home to-

gether. And, please, don't speak to me again about the—I mean, about the subject you mentioned just now, because I can say nothing until I have seen mamma, and then you will understand that all your fears are groundless. Lean harder, dear nurse; that is right. I am strong enough to bear your weight and my own too.'

CHAPTER II.

IN A STRAIT.

'Men have many loves; their true names are—or Vice or Vanity, or Feebleness or Folly.'—*Ariadne.*

GEOFFREY DOYNE had but spoken the truth when he said that his brother's letter was a most imperative one. It had contained as sharp a summons as it was possible to send a man :—

'Come up to London as soon as ever you receive this,' it ran. 'I must see you at once, and on business of the utmost importance.'

The brothers had inherited money at the death of their mother, which was invested in stock, and under the management

of Michael Doyne, and Geoffrey naturally thought that his presence was needed on account of some selling-out or buying-in. His brother did not seem to him to have a soul above money. He could not imagine his troubling himself on any other matter.

He went up to town by an early train the following day, and the same idea was in his mind as he entered the lawyer's office.

'What's up now?' he said, as he encountered Michael's portentous countenance. 'Have Persians fallen, or Hudson's Bay gone up? I do wish you could manage these matters without my interference, Michael. You know how I detest business, and how perfectly I am satisfied that you know a great deal more about it than I do.'

'But this is unfortunately a matter which I could not settle on my own authority,' replied his brother gravely. 'Come into the inner office, Geoffrey. I

cannot speak to you unless we are perfectly alone.'

'This looks ominous,' cried Geoffrey gaily, as he ensconced himself in an armchair and flicked the dust off his dainty boots.

'It is ominous,' replied the other, 'and I trust you are not going to make a jest of it. It is likely to cause trouble enough before long, unless I can bring you to reason.'

'What are you driving at?' said Geoffrey.

'Simply this—that Dr Robertson called at my office yesterday morning and gave me a piece of information that horrified me.'

The younger brother changed colour.

'Well, go on,' he said carelessly; 'what had the old gentleman to say for himself?'

'You know, Geoffrey, as well as I do. He came to tell me that you had broken off your engagement with his daughter Jessie.'

'It is not true; it was Jessie who broke off her engagement with me.'

'I cannot believe it, Geoffrey. Dr Robertson came to me in the greatest distress. He said that both he and his wife had observed that their daughter was out of health and spirits for some weeks past, but that they had not connected the circumstance with your engagement until they noticed that all correspondence had ceased between you. Then they questioned Jessie, and the truth came out—that you had written to her some time back, and said you didn't care for her.'

'Not exactly that,' replied Geoffrey; 'but I told her I did not care for her as I ought to do for the woman I was going to make my wife; and that's the truth, Michael. I *don't* care for her, and I never shall; and under the circumstances, it would be perfectly absurd my marrying her!'

'You should have thought of that before you proposed to her,' remarked Michael drily.

'I did; but I was drawn into it. You know I was as thoroughly "hooked" by the old woman as ever a man could be.'

'Perhaps you were—that is your own business; but having been "hooked," as you call it, you must submit to be "landed."'

'Do you mean to say, then, that you consider I am bound to marry Jessie Robertson?'

'I do, most decidedly.'

'What! after she has sent me back my letters and presents?'

'That has nothing to do with it, Geoffrey. The poor girl sent them back because she was ignorant how else to act. Had she consulted her parents, they would not have permitted her to do so. Jessie would set you free as it is; but Dr and Mrs Robertson are quite of a different opinion. They won't let you off so easily.'

'They intend to keep me to my word?'

'I am afraid there is no doubt of it. The doctor might be talked over, but you know

what his wife is. He says she is furious, and declares that, if you refuse to keep to your engagement with Jessie, she will sue you for a breach of promise; and that's a sort of thing our family could not allow, you know, Geoffrey.'

The younger man sat silent and sullen, with a face of the deepest perplexity.

'I *must* get out of it somehow,' he said presently. 'You are cleverer than I am, Michael; can't you help me?'

'I don't see my way to it, Geoffrey. You proposed to the girl of your own accord, and the engagement has been made public. What earthly excuse can you have for getting out of it?'

'Why, that I don't love her, and that I won't marry her. No; by George! I won't, if I hang for it!'

'There's another woman in the case,' remarked his brother casually.

'Yes, there is,' said Geoffrey.

'Some girl at Ines-cedwyn?'

'Who told you that?'

'I heard of it when I was down at Lynwern. Well, I daresay it will be hard lines, Geoffrey; but you must give her up. You can't marry them both.'

'I won't marry Jessie Robertson,' said Geoffrey stoutly.

'You *must*, man—you *must!* Don't talk nonsense; try to look at the matter in a reasonable light. After all, it's only a toss-up between them, and why should one girl suffer more than the other? There are certain social laws, you know, Geoffrey, which we cannot break with impunity, and this is one of them. Your honour is concerned in your keeping your engagement, and you cannot cancel it without disgracing the whole family. For our sakes, therefore (if not for your own), you must do the right thing by Jessie Robertson.'

'My honour may be concerned elsewhere as well,' rejoined Geoffrey, in a somewhat lowered voice, 'and my happiness as well as my honour. Michael, I

will pay any forfeit, or incur any penalty they may choose to put upon me; but I cannot, and I will not, marry Jessie. I will cut my throat first.'

'No, don't do that,' said his brother, as if he had proposed a thing of every-day occurrence. 'I don't approve of marriage myself as a rule, but I think of the two courses it would be the preferable one to pursue. Little Jessie isn't half bad, you know, when you come to think of it; and if you would only believe me, my dear fellow,' he continued, as he laid his hand on his brother's shoulder, 'one woman will be just the same to you as another when you have been married for three months.'

'Ah! that's what *you* think of it,' said Geoffrey; 'it shows how much you know of the matter.'

'Is this young lady at Ines-cedwyn, then, so very handsome?'

'No.'

'Clever?'

'Not particularly so.'

'Rich?'

'Certainly not.'

'Then what's the great attraction in her, that you should wish to break the heart of a good little girl like Jessie Robertson for her sake?'

'It is one that I don't think you'd understand, Michael,—*I love her!*'

The lawyer laughed.

'My dear boy, I've heard you say the same thing so often before. Excuse me if I think you could manage that (if you tried) with any one of the sex.'

'At any rate, I don't intend to try it with Jessie Robertson.'

Michael Doyne looked grave; he did not like this determined refusal on the part of his brother. It looked so much as if (for once) Geoffrey were in earnest.

'Well, look here!' he said suddenly; 'if you really want to get out of this scrape, Geoffrey, you can only do it by persuading the old people to let you off. Suppose you

meet me at the Robertsons' this evening to talk the matter over? Will you do so?'

'I shall tell them the truth,' said Geoffrey. 'I shall tell them I'm in love with somebody else, and they must think what they like of it.'

'Perhaps that will be the best plan, after all,' replied his brother; 'but, at any rate, you must see them. It was only by promising to summon you to London that I dissuaded the old man from following you to Lynwern.'

'Was it so bad as that?' asked Geoffrey, startled.

'It was, indeed! They're in a rare state in Blenheim Square, I can tell you, and would have written straight off to the pater if I had not promised a lot of things in your name, which I trust you will be found ready to fulfil. I hardly know how the pater would take this, Geoffrey. The Robertsons are his oldest friends, as you know; and he would be quick to resent an affront to them. I'm not sure but

what it might militate against your future prospects!'

'I can't help it if it does,' said Geoffrey, with a sigh. 'I am not going to blast all my happiness for life to please anybody.'

'Ah! that's only talking,' replied his brother carelessly, as he bid him good-bye, and told him not to fail to keep his appointment in Blenheim Square at nine o'clock.

Geoffrey strolled towards his club, ill at ease. He did not waver for a moment from his determination, but he was afraid he might have trouble in keeping to it. He would have had little fear of being able to make Dr Robertson see the matter in a sensible light, but the doctor was unfortunately a cipher in his own house, where Mrs Robertson reigned supreme; and Geoffrey (in common with the rest of mankind) stood terribly in awe of her.

He tried to divert his thoughts and while away the time by purchasing the promised

locket for Fenella—a gold locket with a wreath of laurel on it in blue enamel—(was it prophetic of her future destiny?)—surrounding the emblems of Love and Faith and Hope. Geoffrey thought the design a pretty one, and bought the trinket on the spot. Fenella would think of him when she saw the laurel—the laurel which grows to adorn the head of heroes; and the cross and heart and anchor were emblematic of her own feelings—feelings which he had called God to witness should never be wounded through his means.

It was something to do to buy the locket, and have a piece of his hair put in it, and see it packed and addressed to Ines-cedwyn, and to picture the innocent delight of the receiver when it reached her hands the following morning. But still hours intervened before he could set off to keep his appointment in Blenheim Square, and the men who met him at his club, and 'chaffed' him on keeping out of town at the best season of the year, could not imagine what

had come to Geoffrey Doyne—he was so *distrait* and peevish, not to say rude, in the irritation caused by his perplexity and doubt. When at last he reached the house, Michael was ready to receive him in the hall.

'I thought it better for me to come here first, and smooth matters over a little,' he said as his brother entered.

'I almost wish now that I had written instead,' replied Geoffrey. 'However, I am sure that Dr Robertson is too sensible not to understand my motives.'

'I am afraid the doctor is out,' said Michael Doyne. 'However, you will see Mrs Robertson, and it is all the same thing.'

He knew it was not the same thing, and so did his brother, but it was too late for remonstrance. Geoffrey was already on the threshold of the library, where Mrs Robertson sat in state to receive him.

To say that this lady was a con-

glomeration of all the most ferocious mothers-in-law that ever existed, is not to say too much. Her sharp tongue and vixenish temper were well known in the circle of her acquaintance, and she joined them to an obstinacy that was unequalled. It was she alone who had insisted upon Geoffrey Doyne being brought to book for his defalcation, and forced to fulfil his promises to her daughter. Good old Dr Robertson might have shaken his head over his faithlessness to his dying day, but he would never have dreamt of insisting that he should marry the girl; and Jessie herself, although she inherited somewhat of her mother's spirit, was too young to have made such good use of it. But Mrs Robertson was above such petty scruples. Jessie was one of seven daughters, and this young man, who had the most excellent prospects, had formally entered into an engagement to marry her, and now wanted to back out of it, and her mother was determined to

know the reason why. So she sat, enthroned in her husband's arm-chair, ready to receive the culprit—her sandy hair drawn tightly off her forehead, as though to say she would admit of no compromise, and her hard steel-grey eyes fixed on him with the look of an inquisitor.

Geoffrey Doyne, though with some hesitation, advanced in the old way, and held out his hand.

'No, thank you, Mr Doyne,' she said tartly; 'not until this most unpleasant business is settled between us. Be good enough to seat yourself. I am glad your brother is here to be witness to what passes at our interview.'

Geoffrey flushed to the temples, but he did as she desired him.

'My brother is here as my friend, Mrs Robertson,' he replied. 'Otherwise he can have no possible concern in my private affairs.'

'I don't know that, Mr Doyne,' said

his hostess. 'Did you come here as *our friend*, it might be so; but under the circumstances, I should think very few *gentlemen* would be found willing to take your side.'

'Do you mean to insinuate, madam—' commenced Geoffrey hotly; but Michael came between them as mediator.

'Mrs Robertson,' he said, 'I persuaded my brother to come here to-night that we might have an explanation, not a quarrel; and I do not see how recrimination can help the cause on either side. Will you hear what he has to say in extenuation of his conduct, or would you prefer to be the first to speak?'

'I wish to say first what I think of him,' replied Mrs Robertson.

'Let it be so, then. Geoffrey, you see the justice of this. Mrs Robertson is not only a lady and your hostess, but she stands in the position of the injured party. Let me ask you, therefore, to listen patiently to whatever she may have

to say, and you can justify your own action in the matter afterwards.'

'Which, I should imagine, Mr Geoffrey Doyne will find it most difficult to do,' interposed Mrs Robertson.

'No such thing, madam,' broke in Geoffrey warmly. 'I have the best possible excuse—'

But Michael came again to the rescue.

'Patience, my dear fellow—patience! You will never arrive at a satisfactory conclusion unless each consents to hear what the other has to say.'

Geoffrey sank into his chair again; and Mrs Robertson turned her back on him without ceremony.

'You will excuse me, Mr Doyne,' she said to the elder brother, 'if I prefer, for the present at all events, to address myself to you. The case stands simply thus. Last year Mr Geoffrey Doyne stayed for a month in our house, and I trusted him implicitly in the company of

all my daughters, with whom he appeared on the best of terms—'

'Of course I was. I romped with one as much as the other,' interposed Geoffrey.

But Mrs Robertson took no notice of the remark.

'After a while, however, I perceived that he admired Jessie above the rest; indeed, on several occasions I had seen familiarities take place between them—'

'She used to come and sit on my lap whether I would or no,' grumbled Geoffrey.

'So I considered it my duty as a mother,' continued the lady, waving her hand, as though to wave the younger brother off into infinitesimal space, 'to ask him his intentions with regard to her, and was greatly astonished to find that he had no intentions whatever.'

'Of course I hadn't—never thought of such a thing,' said Geoffrey.

'But you *ought* to have thought of it; it

was most reprehensible,' replied his brother, frowning.

'I am so glad you see it in *our* light, dear Mr Doyne,' rejoined Mrs Robertson; 'for it is hard, after so many years of friendly intercourse have subsisted between the families, to think of a rupture taking place now. The dear doctor feels it keenly. The suspense has quite aged him.'

'Oh, it must not be,' said Michael decidedly; and Geoffrey felt a chill run through him at the words.

'Of course I remonstrated with your brother,' resumed Mrs Robertson, 'as he will do me the justice to acknowledge, and pointed out to him the harm he had done our dear girl, and the misery he had caused her. And then Dr Robertson and his father both spoke to him; and the issue was, that he proposed formally to my husband for Jessie's hand (we have the letter now, Mr Doyne), and the engagement was ratified between them. Of course

our friends all know of it; we never dreamt for a moment that Mr Geoffrey Doyne could be so *base* to go back from his written word; and the poor child has been actually making the linen for her trousseau for the last three months. When, the other day, as I was questioning her on her altered looks and spirits, she burst into tears, and, to my *amazement*, told me that it was all over between them; that Mr Geoffrey Doyne had sent for his letters and presents to be returned to him, and that he had been cruel enough to write and tell the dear girl that he had never cared for her, and that he refused to marry her,—the basest, cruellest, most heartless conduct I ever heard of in my life,' continued Mrs Robertson, trembling with anger, 'and after the kindness and hospitality he had received at our hands too! But it cannot be allowed, Mr Doyne. I will not sit by quietly and see my poor child pine away in consequence of such treachery. Your brother must fulfil the

engagement he entered into with her, or she shall have public compensation for his desertion. The world shall not have it in its power to say that we boasted idly of our daughter's expectations.'

'Am I to be allowed to speak now?' demanded Geoffrey, who had with difficulty kept quiet during the last part of this harangue.

'If Mrs Robertson has quite finished,' said his brother coldly.

'I have said all I wish to say,' replied the lady, 'and no explanations Mr Geoffrey Doyne can offer me in return can ever excuse his conduct to my daughter.'

'Perhaps not in *your* eyes, madam,' said Geoffrey; 'but you have appealed to the judgment of the world. I am glad you have done me the justice to acknowledge that I never had any intention of proposing to Jessie until you forced me to do so. And therein lies my greatest fault. I should have resisted your arguments

then as I do now. I have made the task doubly hard by delay. Ever since I yielded to your wishes in that respect, I have seen how wrong I was to do so. Each day has convinced me, more and more, that I am not, and I never was, in love with your daughter, and that if I marry her we shall only make each other miserable for life. It was with this conviction that I wrote to her a month ago—telling her the truth. I did not say I would not marry her, neither did I ask her to return my letters or presents. I said just what I have told you—that I had not considered sufficiently before I made that proposal of marriage to her, and that I did not care for her so much as I ought to do. And if that is being base and dishonourable in your eyes, it is not in mine. I consider I should have been much more to blame had I married her without telling her the truth.'

'Unfortunately, you see, Geoffrey, it is not what *you* think, but what the world

will say about the matter,' remarked Michael gravely; 'and there is no doubt that a thing of this kind militates against a girl's prospects in life.'

'*Militates against her prospects!*' cried Mrs Robertson shrilly; 'I should think it did—it ruins them! Do you suppose I am going to let my daughter be pointed at as having been jilted—*and by you!*' she ended, with withering scorn.

'Would you prefer her, then, to marry a man who does not love her?' retorted Geoffrey.

'That is of little consequence,' replied the lady. '*No* men care for their wives (as far as I can see) in the present day. The mere fact of their *being* their wives is sufficient to make them indifferent! But my daughter is of a very different disposition from you. She is amiable and affectionate and loving, and I will not see her heart broken and her future prospects spoiled for any man alive.'

'If you knew all, Mrs Robertson,' re-

sumed Geoffrey, colouring, 'you would see that you could not break her heart more readily than by marrying her to me.'

'You had better make a clean breast whilst you are about it,' suggested his brother.

'Perhaps you are right. Well, then, Mrs Robertson, my objection to renewing my engagement with Jessie does not lie wholly in the fact that I do not care sufficiently for her to make her a good husband. There is a stronger reason than that—a more insurmountable one. I am in love with another woman!'

He said the words slowly, as though they contained an argument to quench all her maternal hopes. But they had only the effect of making her more angry and determined.

'And do you call that an *excuse?*' she exclaimed; 'it is an aggravation of your offence. You are in love with another woman, and so *my* daughter is to go to the wall! My Jessie is to be deprived

throughout life of all you had promised to give her, because you have taken it into your head to set up some one else in her stead. But you will find it is not quite so easy to chop and change in that manner, Mr Doyne. You have pledged your word to my daughter, and you must redeem it—or give her such compensation as the law may award her.'

'You will surely not bring this matter into court?' cried Geoffrey, with horror. 'You will never drag your daughter's name through the newspapers as the plaintiff in a breach of promise case?'

Mrs Robertson saw her advantage, and clung to it.

'We certainly *shall*,' she replied, 'unless you think better of the insult you have offered us. The doctor and I have talked this matter over, and he has left it entirely in my hands. He is no more disposed to sit by quietly, and see Jessie's heart broken without an effort to save her, than I am.'

'But how can you improve the affair by

making it public? You should consider your daughter's feelings,' said the young man, in evident distress. He did not perceive that the agitation he evinced was the weakest card he could play into her hands; nor did he guess that the threat she used towards him had been suggested by his astute lawyer brother.

'That is *our* business,' replied Mrs Robertson coldly, 'and we shall do what we consider best for our child without any reference to her feelings. Neither do I think *you* are the proper person to remind me of my duty in that respect, Mr Doyne, considering the *very little* regard you have shown towards them yourself.'

'What *am* I to do?' demanded Geoffrey, in a low voice, of his brother.

'You'll have to stick to it, my boy. I don't see any way out of it,' replied Michael, in the same tone.

'I *cannot*—it is impossible. I will die first,' said the younger man, in a voice of despair.

'Well, Mr Doyne,' exclaimed Mrs Robertson after a short pause, 'is it of any use our prolonging this interview? Mr Geoffrey does not appear to be disposed to do what is right and honourable in the matter, and therefore it only remains for the doctor and myself to take the steps that seem best to us. And the first thing, I believe, my husband proposes to do is to go down and have an interview with your father at Ryelands.'

'Might I ask you, my dear Mrs Robertson, as a personal favour to myself,' said Michael Doyne, in his blandest voice, 'to allow Geoffrey a couple of days in which to think over what you have said to him? I feel convinced that, if you will do so, we shall have arrived at some satisfactory conclusion by that time. For my sake, Mrs Robertson—will you do it for *my* sake?'

'Well, Mr Doyne, for *your* sake I will; for I know we have your good wishes, although we appear to have lost those of

your brother. In a couple of days, then, I shall expect to hear from you; and meanwhile I shall say nothing to my daughter, nor take any more decided steps in the matter. Good-night, dear Mr Doyne; whatever happens, I shall always feel that you have proved yourself a true and faithful friend to us,' and shaking hands with the elder brother, Mrs Robertson swept out of the room without vouchsafing one glance towards the spot where Geoffrey stood, silent and dejected.

'Come on, Geoff,' said Michael briskly, as soon as she had disappeared; 'we had better be going home; it is no use our remaining longer here.'

The younger man followed him mechanically to the hall door. His brain was in such a whirl he hardly knew what he was about.

'What *am* I to do?' he repeated, in a confused manner, as they walked through the square together.

'Well, to tell you the plain truth,

Geoffrey, I only see one thing for you to do, and that is to renew your engagement, and marry the girl, and take her back to India with you.'

'You forget the other,' said Geoffrey gloomily.

'No, I don't, my dear boy. I see the mess you're in as plainly as you do. But the other is a matter of *feeling*, Geoffrey, and this is a matter of *right*. Tell me a little about this young lady at Inescedwyn. Are her parents staying there?'

'No; she is with a servant.'

'You haven't said anything to them about marrying her, then?'

'Not yet.'

'It's only been a little spooning affair on your own account, eh?'

'Yes; I suppose you'd call it so.'

'Well, then, my dear Geoffrey, there's no question about the matter. You must break it off.'

'I *can't* do that, Michael.'

'You can, if you choose.'

'I *cannot.* There are reasons—'

'Oh yes! I understand all your reasons before you tell me. You like her much better than this one; in fact, you're over head and ears in love with her, and you want to marry her, and take her out to India. That's it now, isn't it? Well, I allow that it is very hard, and, as I said before, I daresay it will cut you up to have to part from her and marry Jessie Robertson instead; but *it must be done*, Geoffrey. There's the long and the short of it. Your honour demands the sacrifice, and respect for your family demands it. We can't have our name dragged through a breach of promise case, and connected with that of the Robertsons. It would be too disgraceful. I don't believe my father would ever speak to you again. And then, there's something to be said for Jessie into the bargain. The girl's awfully fond of you. The doctor says she's so changed by your behaviour,

that you'd hardly know her; and I don't see why she should be made to suffer any more than the other one. You can't keep your word to *both*, that's clear; and Jessie Robertson will bear the more open disgrace of the two, if you break with her. Now, do go home and try to think it over in that light. *Some one* must bear the brunt of your folly in any case; but if you persevere in your present determination, we shall *all* have to bear it, which isn't quite fair upon us.'

Geoffrey did go home—miserable, undecided, and almost hopeless. Still, he trusted that something might turn up to help him out of his difficulty—that Jessie's parents might relent, or the girl herself refuse to renew their engagement. Surely, he thought, if he told her to her face he didn't love her, she would never hold him to his word.

Meanwhile there was no reason that his poor trusting Fenella should suffer

for his fault. Time enough for her to learn the worst when the worst came. So he sat down and wrote her a long loving letter (such as he knew she would carry in her bosom all the day), and told her he was afraid his business would detain him in town longer than he had expected; but he did not mention what that business was. And when he had finished the letter, he laid his head down upon the paper and burst into tears.

'It is impossible,' he kept on repeating to himself. 'I *cannot*—I *must* not desert her. Not *now*—O God! not *now*.'

His task would have been much easier if the other girl had not cared for him also, but he knew too well that she did care. It had been his flattered vanity at her evident affection that had drawn him into the noose that galled him now. Still he thought, if all other means failed, he must make an appeal to Jessie's generosity to set him free. He did not know that her temperament was of so jealous

a nature, that the very plea he urged for liberty would be an incentive to her to bind him closer. When the two days of grace were over, he was as distracted and undecided as ever, and Michael had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to put in an appearance in Blenheim Square.

The meeting this time, however, was of a more friendly character. Dr Robertson was present, and Michael Doyne had already consulted with the parents on the most politic step to be taken.

'We have no wish to appear harsh or oppressive, my dear young friend,' commenced the doctor, who had been previously 'coached' by his wife what to say; 'but we have our child's happiness to consult in this matter, and I am bound to tell you that it is very seriously concerned. Mrs Robertson and I have, therefore, after mature deliberation, come to the conclusion that Jessie is, after all, the proper person to decide whether the

engagement shall continue or not, and we shall leave it entirely in her hands.'

Geoffrey's face flushed with hope.

'Do I understand you, sir, that Miss Robertson and I are to settle this business by ourselves, and that you will abide by her decision, whatever it may be?'

'Yes; that is our wish, Mr Doyne. After all, it is *her* happiness, and not *ours*, that is at stake; and if she tells us she has released you of her own free will, we shall take no further steps in the matter.'

'Thank you—thank you a thousand times,' said Geoffrey fervently. 'Does Jessie know I am in the house? May I see her now?'

'Yes; I have prepared my daughter for the interview,' replied Mrs Robertson, with a grim smile, as she preceded the young man out of the room.

Geoffrey followed her briskly, his heart throbbing with hope. He thought he should

have no difficulty in making Jessie understand how much better it would be for both of them to be free.

Mrs Robertson led him to the drawing-room and opened the door.

'Jessie, my dear,' she said quietly, 'here is Mr Geoffrey Doyne, who wishes to speak to you.'

Then she retreated, and left the young people together.

Now, until that morning Jessie Robertson had been entirely ignorant that she had any rival to dispute her possession of Geoffrey Doyne. She had accepted his letter just as he wrote it, and had never lost hope that he would find out he had been mistaken, and return some day and ask her to take back those presents, and give him a place in her affections once more. And she was quite ready to do so, for, truth to say, he had never lost that place. His handsome face and figure had made an irrevocable impression on her mind, and if she did not

love him with all the ardour of Fenella Barrington, she loved him to the utmost power of her nature—and no one can do more. The rupture of their engagement had been a great shock to her, and the disappointment had left its traces on her features—had darkened the lines beneath her eyes, and washed the colour from her rosy cheeks.

Mrs Robertson had seen all this; she knew that the girl looked pathetic and pretty, and the young man was emotional and easily impressed; and she trusted a great deal to the effect Jessie's altered appearance would have upon him. Besides, she had, as she said, prepared her daughter for this interview. She had hinted at the possibility of some low-born rival as a means of rousing the girl's jealousy, and then she had implored her, for the sake of Geoffrey Doyne's family (no less than for his own), to be firm, and bring him back to his allegiance. He would thank her for it afterwards (the

mother said), when he knew his own heart better, and could rate her devotion for him at its true value. So Jessie came forward —rather timidly, it is true, but still very affectionately, and much in the old style, and lifted her tearful blue eyes to his face.

'I *knew* you would come back,' she murmured. 'I knew you would remember our old affection some day. Mamma said it was impossible that you could quite forget me.'

For a moment he almost forgot his mission in looking at her pale cheeks and attenuated figure.

'Why, Jessie,' he exclaimed, 'have you been ill?'

'Yes—a little. What does it matter? I fretted, of course—I could not help fretting; but I shall be all right again now.'

'Do you mean to say my letter caused this? Oh, what a brute I am!' cried Geoffrey.

'Don't say that,' replied Jessie softly, as

she sat down beside him. 'You did it for the best, I am sure.'

'I did indeed. I thought it would be less dishonourable to cancel our engagement than to let you marry me without knowing the truth. For I am not worthy of you, Jessie, and since we have been separated I have thought so much more seriously of such things. Marriage is a very solemn contract, is it not? And it would be unjust to let you enter into it with any one who does not love you as you deserve. Don't you agree with me?'

'But I always thought you loved me more than I deserved, Geoffrey,' she said, in a low voice; 'for, after all, what is there in me to love?'

'There is everything — everything to make a man happy, if he were not only too great a fool to appreciate it, Jessie.'

'But you made me quite happy,' she whispered.

'Did I? I am afraid I should not make you happy for long. I own an atrociously

bad temper, Jessie—irritable and easily put out; and I am a selfish, heartless sort of fellow at the best. You would have wearied of me in no time, and then there would have been no remedy for either of us. It was better to put a stop to it before it was too late, wasn't it?'

'I should soon have grown used to your tempers, Geoffrey—all men have them, mamma says—and I never thought you heartless; at least, not until you sent me that letter.' And then she began to cry.

'Jessie, did that letter hurt you so very much?'

'Oh, terribly,' she said, amidst her sobs; 'how could it be otherwise when I had made up my mind we were to be married so soon, and half my things were made, too, and I had asked my cousins to be bridesmaids? And now—now it seems as if everything in the whole world was over for me, and I should never be happy again—never!'

'Oh, don't cry—for Heaven's sake, don't

cry!' said Geoffrey despairingly, 'and let me try and think what is best to be done.'

They sat silent for a few moments, whilst Jessie caught her breath, and dabbed her eyes with her pocket-handkerchief. Then Geoffrey said gravely,—

'Jessie! I thought—and I think still—that we shall never be happy as man and wife; but your father and mother consider that I have gone so far in proposing to you, that I have no right even to suggest such a thing as altering our minds, and that it must rest with *you* to decide whether our marriage takes place or not.'

'I would much rather it took place,' sobbed the girl.

'Listen to me,' went on her companion, 'and don't decide in a hurry. Remember the whole happiness of our lives depends upon your answer. I am compelled to tell you—in justice to you and to myself—that I do not love you as I ought to do. In fact, Jessie, I—

I—(don't be angry with me for saying it)—but I—care for somebody else; and that fact alone would make my marriage with you a sacrilege and a blasphemy which I do not dare to contemplate.'

She did not answer him, and after a while he proceeded,—

'Don't you think it would be very wrong of us to marry under the circumstances, Jessie? Don't you think it may be the wrecking of both our lives to know there is such a barrier between us? Don't you think it would be more honourable in the sight of God and man for us to go our different ways in the world, than to take vows upon ourselves which we know it is not in our power to perform?'

He paused, waiting for and expecting her acquiescence; and had the girl followed the natural instincts of her womanhood, she would have told him he was right. But the hint he had

given her of his love for another, vague and undefined though it was, had raised the worst feelings of which Jessie Robertson was capable, and made her resolve, at all hazards, to claim him for her own. He should never, *never* (so she said to herself) be free to go and marry that other woman, and leave her to be laughed at or pitied by all their acquaintance. She loved the man, but she loved herself better, and she was determined if possible to keep him by her side. So all she answered was,—

'*I* could fulfil them, Geoffrey, easily enough. Nothing could be difficult for me to do that was done for you.'

'By heavens!' he exclaimed, driven to desperation by her quiet perseverance, 'do you mean to say that you would stoop to marry me when I tell you plainly that I do not care for you?'

'Yes, Geoffrey, I would; because you will care for me some day. I am sure you will.'

'And with the knowledge that I love some one else?'

'It is not pleasant for me to hear, of course,' said Jessie, 'but you will get over it in time—and you were engaged to me first.'

'Then I am to understand,' rejoined the young man gloomily, 'that you desire me to hold to this engagement, of which I have told you frankly I am weary?'

'Because you fail in your promises to me, is that any reason I should fail also?' she replied. 'I should consider myself bound to you, Geoffrey, whether you deserted me or not.'

'And this is your final decision?' asked her companion, with white lips.

'How could I come to any other? I should only be telling a story if I said I did?'

'Jessie! I told Dr and Mrs Robertson that I would abide by what you said. Think once more; for God's sake, think before you answer me! Remember it is

the happiness or misery of our whole lives upon which you are deciding. *Are we to be married to each other, or are we not?'*

He hung upon her reply as the criminal in the dock hangs upon the decision of the jury, and she gave it with apparently as little personal feeling.

'If you ask *me*, Geoffrey, I can only say what I have said before, *Yes*. If I hadn't wished to marry you, I should never have consented to be engaged to you. I don't change my mind every other day, as you seem to do!'

'God forgive you!' was trembling on his lips as he regarded her, but with an effort he altered the words. 'Be it so, then!' he said, between his teeth; and then, without another look, he turned upon his heel and quitted the house, leaving Jessie Robertson to announce to her father and mother the determination at which she had arrived.

CHAPTER III.

DESERTED.

'Castalio! Oh, how often has he sworn
Nature should change—the sun and stars grow dark—
E'er he would falsify his vows to me?
Make haste, confusion, then! Sun, lose thy light!
And stars, drop dead with sorrow to the earth!
For my Castalio's false.'

Otway.

THE long-expected letter from Mentone, addressed to Eliza Bennett, arrived but a few days after Geoffrey Doyne had quitted Ines-cedwyn. Lady Wilson's party had finished their wanderings for the present, and were settled in the Villa Abracci, but the event did not seem to have fulfilled the expectations of Mrs Barrington, who

complained bitterly of all her surroundings. The heat was intolerable; the house had not sufficient accommodation; that odious Miss Russell had joined their party, and was making herself most conspicuous with Mr Wilson; poor dear Colonel Ellerman had died suddenly of bronchitis the week before; and those brutes of agents had written from London to say that the tenants in South Audley Street wished to give up the rooms at the end of three months. In fact, poor Mrs Barrington's star was decidedly in the descendent.

'Only fancy!' she wrote, 'those wretches giving up the rooms in July—the very month of all others when nobody wishes to remain in London. I made sure they would renew their agreement until Michaelmas. I think it is most inconsiderate of them, not to say dishonest—for there is no chance of my letting the rooms again. And what are we to do with ourselves in London at that time—you and I and Fenella? We shall be roasted alive.

I should remain here, of course, or go on to some livelier place, only I am afraid I shall not be able to afford it. I hope to goodness you and the girl are not running into any expense that you can possibly avoid, for all my money has gone in railway fares, and the people here change their dresses so many times a day, I haven't half enough clothes to wear. I consider that Lady Wilson ought, at the very least, to offer to pay my expenses back to England, for she has quite brought me here on false pretences. The weekly expenses are much higher than she said they would be, and she has given the best bedroom in the house to that hideous Anna Russell—after saying she couldn't receive Fenella, too. Such deceit! And the son is exactly like his mother—stingy and false! I hate them both. I was dreadfully distressed to hear about your leg. You really should be more careful. It is selfish of you to go falling about in that way, when you know how I depend

upon your services. What would you have done if I had required you to join me at Mentone? It's just a chance that I did not. Lady Wilson's maid is a fool; she can't dress hair a bit, and the old woman is so selfish, she will hardly ever let her do any sewing for me. I often wish I had Fenella here to help me with needlework. I hope you or she will write soon and let me hear that your leg is healed again. I couldn't stand crutches about the house. And I'm sure I've had trouble enough already. You may fancy the shock dear Colonel Ellerman's death was to me. So sudden and so sad! And he's left every halfpenny he possessed to his sister, too; it makes me so mad to think of it. However, I suppose it's the will of Heaven. I am glad to hear your account of Miss Fenella's looks. It is just as well one of the family should enjoy good health. I feel ill and weak enough myself. I am sure this place doesn't agree with me, and Lady Wilson is the worst

housekeeper I ever met. The dinners are simply not fit to eat.'

Eliza Bennett was as distressed by the receipt of this letter as if she took every word of it for gospel.

'Your poor dear mamma!' she exclaimed; 'what worries she has in this life, to be sure! And to think that I am not with her, too! that is the cruellest part of it. Not that I could hope to be of much good (being only a servant), but still it's hard for a lady who's been used to have every comfort about her, to wait on herself, and eat dinners she don't fancy; isn't it, Miss Fenella?'

'Mamma might have had us both with her if she had wished it; it's her own fault that she's alone!' replied Fenella, with her eyes fixed upon the summer sky, and her heart filled to the very brim with Geoffrey Doyne.

'Lor'! Miss Fenella, you seem to have grown very cold-like lately,' remarked the servant. 'You fretted so at parting with

your mamma, I thought you'd be all in a flutter at the idea of meeting her again. Wouldn't you like to go back to London, miss?'

The girl's face flushed with the sudden joy of expectation. London was the happy place that held her lover.

'To *London*, nurse! Oh yes, I should; very much indeed. But is there any chance of it?'

'Well, I should say from your mamma's letter as there was every chance, my dear; for here we are in the middle of July, and even if she don't come back herself, some one must go and look after them rooms as soon as they're empty.'

'Let me write and tell mamma that we will look after them,' cried Fenella impulsively, 'and then she needn't come home any sooner on that account. Let us go back to London together, nurse—you and I; it will be ever so much nicer than Ines-cedwyn.'

Eliza Bennett looked in the girl's tell-

tale face, and thought to herself. 'That there chap's in London, I'd take my oath of it;' but all she said was,—

'You can write what you please to your mamma, Miss Fenella; but we couldn't go back, at any rate, till the end of July, for the parties don't give up the rooms till that time.'

And her young mistress turned from her with a sigh, to console herself by writing a long letter to Geoffrey Doyne, in which she informed him of her mother's permanent address, and begged him to lose no time in acquainting her with the news of their engagement.

The letters which came and went so constantly at this period, no less than the gold locket which Fenella wore next her heart both night and day, had not escaped the notice of Eliza Bennett, and they made her feel very uneasy. She could not be quite sure of what was going on beneath her eyes—whether it was a mere childish folly, not worth a second

thought, or something more serious, that would raise Mrs Barrington's anger. The *amourettes* of that lady herself had been so profuse and vicarious, that she had somewhat dulled thereby the sense of propriety in the breast of her servant; and Bennett was really unable to decide whether her mistress would ridicule her fears or blame her imprudence on the score of Fenella's sea-side flirtation. Yet she could not help observing that the girl had grown more thoughtful since the young man's departure, and she had detected her on more than one occasion crying quietly to herself. She had heard her talk in her sleep, too—murmuring broken sentences and loving words, as she lay flushed on her pillows, with her fair hair falling on her shoulders, and the child-like tears still trembling on her lashes. And yet, withal, Fenella seemed so happy and so well, it was difficult to believe that anything grieved her. So Bennett comforted herself with the idea

that, if her young lady *had* had a little love affair, she'd soon forget all about it. Girls had many such, as a rule, before they settled down in life; and, at any rate, the gentleman had left Ines-cedwyn —that was one blessing—and it couldn't be long now before her mamma came back to England to look after her herself.

Meanwhile, Fenella was what she seemed — as happy as she could be apart from Geoffrey. For these great loves pay heavy penalties for the bliss of being; they render separation an agony. But the tears which Bennett saw upon her sleeping face were not those of distrust, nor of fear. They were the natural outcome of a new-born excitement, that found its best relief in painless weeping. The days of separation were irksome to bear, but they were not intolerable; for Fenella had a firm belief in their speedy termination, and each one brought her some fresh assurance of Geoffrey's love for her.

For here the man's courage had utterly failed him. He knew he had pledged himself to do that which should kill all the new-born blossoming hopes in Fenella's breast, as certainly as a knife drawn across her throat would destroy the fair young life she had given up to him. He knew that in a few weeks at the furthest, she would hear that, that would desecrate him in her eyes for evermore; that would make him appear falser and more cruel than anything she had ever dreamt of; that would destroy, not only her belief in him, but in God and Heaven, and even a hereafter. He knew all this, as surely as he knew that he was committing the basest action of his life in deserting her; and yet he had not the courage to strike the fatal blow, and let her learn the worst at once. He continued to write to her, and without a hint that he had renewed his engagement with Jessie Robertson. He told no further

falsehoods, it is true; he ceased to allude to their own marriage, or their future life; but he told her she was his world, and that without her he should be miserable; and Fenella could imagine the rest. To be Geoffrey's world was sufficient for her happiness, and, naturally, she continued to believe that all they had spoken of together would follow. The only shadow on her joy was their prolonged separation, and that was soon to be put an end to.

Mrs Barrington's first letter from Mentone was speedily followed by another, equally querulous, in which she told her daughter and servant that she had had a violent quarrel with Lady Wilson, who was, without exception, 'the most jealous, cross-grained, interfering old cat' she ever met with, and affirmed her intention of returning to England as soon as ever the rooms in South Audley Street were ready to receive her, ordering Bennett and Fenella

at the same time to take up their abode there before herself.

'The agent tells me,' she wrote, 'that the creatures will go out on the thirty-first. You had better, therefore, travel up on the first, and I will join you on the second or third. I wouldn't sleep in my room until you have seen it is thoroughly cleaned and set in its usual order, for any earthly consideration.'

To see the colour that flew into Fenella's face at this intelligence was a revelation. She glowed like a carnation at the very thought.

'On the first, Bennett! We are to go to London on the first of August!' she exclaimed; 'only five days more. What shall I do to make them pass away?'

'You seem very anxious to leave poor Ines-cedwyn, miss,' remarked Bennett curiously. 'I'm afraid you've changed your mind about it since you first came here.'

The girl turned her grey eyes, in which the tears had suddenly risen, towards the sea.

'Dear, sweet Ines-cedwyn!' she murmured, 'with its singing waves and golden sands. Can it ever seem less lovely to me than it does now? Oh no, nurse! I have not changed my mind, and I am not ungrateful. I shall always remember Ines-cedwyn as the place in which the happiest days of my life were passed; only—only,' she added, a little wistfully, 'I *do* want to go to London now.'

'Well, my dear, I hope as you won't be disappointed in it, but it's very hot and dusty at this time of the year,' grumbled Bennett, as she turned away.

Yet when the first of August arrived, and Fenella found herself once more in South Audley Street, with all the rooms in that delightful state of dirt and confusion in which lodgers are accustomed to leave them, and Bennett out of temper at the prospect of the work before her, she still went singing about to that unheard accompaniment of music in her heart.

Geoffrey was not there to meet her, it is true (how could he be?), but he was close at hand, and she had received a letter from him, not twelve hours before she left Ines-cedwyn, full of love and tender allusions to the past. And she had written in reply to say that she was there, actually *there*, in the same town with him; and it could not be long—it was impossible it could be long—before he held her in his arms. Mrs Barrington arrived to her time — dusty, dishevelled, and decidedly cross. But she could not restrain her surprise at the first view of Fenella.

'Good heavens!' she exclaimed, 'what have you done to the child, Bennett? Why, she's developed to a woman; and what a lovely colour she has! I must say it, my dear; your complexion would put the whole of Piver's shop to shame. It is positively like nothing but lilies and carnations.'

'Oh, mamma! I am so glad you think

I am improved,' said Fenella, with a bright blush, as she knelt beside Mrs Barrington's chair. 'I have been so happy down at Ines-cedwyn; I think that must be the reason that I look so well.'

'It's the mountain air and the smell of the sea, ma'am,' put in Eliza Bennett, rather hurriedly; 'it *must* be, for I am sure Miss Fenella has had no other doctors whilst you was away.'

'Well, I wish I had had the same doctors myself, for I'm worn to death with my trip,' replied her mistress fretfully. 'Do get up, Fenella; you're dragging my dress to one side, and I'm too tired to bear the weight of your arms upon my knees. I'm sure I wish I had never left London. I've lost all the fun of the season, and now I suppose we shall have to vegetate here whilst everybody is away at the sea-side.'

'We shall manage to amuse ourselves, mamma, surely,' said Fenella, smiling, as she thought of the occupation which was

in store for both of them, in preparing for her wedding with Geoffrey Doyne.

'You don't know what you're talking about, child. Everybody is out of town at this time of the year, and the place is so hot and dusty, you can hardly stir out of the house. However, we must bear it as best we can, for there's no alternative. I can't go through the trouble and worry of letting the rooms again, and if I did so, I don't know where on earth we should go.'

'Oh no, mamma! don't think of it,' cried Fenella. 'We shall be very happy here—I am sure we shall—and there's no knowing what may turn up to amuse and occupy us.'

But when Mrs Barrington found herself alone with her favourite servant, she told a very different story.

'Bennett,' she said confidentially, 'I didn't like to say too much before the girl (for girls are always so conceited about their personal appearance), but I

never was so startled in my life as when I saw Fenella. I couldn't have believed three months would make such a change in any one. She's positively *lovely;* I have seen nothing to equal her in Paris or Mentone! And so fresh too; it's what the men run after now-a-days, freshness! I shall let these rooms again as soon as ever I can, Bennett, and take her abroad.'

'Let the rooms again, ma'am!' echoed Bennett. 'I thought as you said you had decided against it?'

'So I did at first, you old goose; but don't you see I shall have a better chance of marrying that girl now than at any other period of her existence. Three months ago no man would have looked at her—she was a child, a stick, a nonentity! But now they would just rave about her. She has unfolded like a rosebud opened this morning. She's in the first flush of girlhood, and yet she's a woman! You can see it by her eyes. I never was

so astonished in the world before! What's done it, Bennett? Has she had a love affair at Ines-cedwyn?'

'Oh, dear no, ma'am!' gasped Bennett, trembling from head to foot under the dread of discovery.

'Ah well, I suppose it's nature; but I must say she's lovely, though I'm her mother. Whom does she take most after, Bennett—me, or the poor captain? I was always the fairer of the two, you know.'

'Oh yes, ma'am; and Miss Fenella favours you wonderfully, especially about the skin. I don't know as I ever saw such another skin as hers; it's like white satin.'

'And her figure's very fine too; and men think so much of figures now-a-days. Everybody can have a pretty face who knows how to "make up" properly; but you can't have a good figure in an evening dress, unless Heaven has given it to you. It would be an *immense* thing for

me if I could marry Miss Fenella well, and without delay, Bennett—an *immense* thing. It would just save me from ruin, and nothing else. And she *ought* to go off! Dressed in white and silver, or white and gold, she would look splendid! glorious! I believe I could turn out that girl so that no one could come within a mile of her; and it would be worth my while to do it, at any price! How can we manage it, Bennett? Do ransack that good old head of yours, and find out some means by which we can carry on the war for a few months longer, until I have introduced her at Trouville or Baden, or some of those places where the best men go. And she speaks French so perfectly, that she might marry a foreigner and a title—one of those rich nobles who frequent the watering-places through the autumn months—and I should get her off my hands and out of my way at the same time.'

'Yes, yes! my dear lady. We will

manage it. Never you fear,' replied the servant, in a soothing tone.

She generally treated her mistress as if she were a teething child that required conciliation; but the only childish thing about Mrs Barrington was her refractoriness. In all other things Eliza Bennett was as spun silk in her hands.

'You're so tired with your journey, ma'am,' she continued. 'You mustn't think of anything now but getting rested. And you've had nothing to eat to-day, so to speak, and yet you turned against your dinner! Shall I run out and get you a little lobster with a dash of salad, and a glass of champagne, and see if that will tempt you to pick a bit?'

'Yes, if you like, Bennett,' returned the lady languidly, 'for I really don't feel as if I could keep on my legs much longer.'

'Lie down, my dear mistress,' exclaimed the servant anxiously, 'and don't move till I've brought you some-

thing to eat. There! let me loose your hair, and give you a fan and the eau de Cologne. And would you like Miss Fenella to sit with you, ma'am, whilst I'm away?'

'No, Bennett, thank you. I shall do very well. I feel as if I were at home again, now I have you to cosset me and look after me. I'm a poor creature, and cannot live without love.'

The servant's plain face glowed with ardour.

'You will always have *mine*, my dear, *dear* lady,' she replied.

'Ah well, I hope I may, Bennett; but the world is very ungrateful, and the best friends change sometimes. You would be surprised to see the alteration in those horrid Wilsons. The old woman hardly spoke to me the last week I was in Mentone; and as for her son, his behaviour was positively disgusting. He and that odious creature Anna Russell used to leave

the house directly after breakfast, and never reappear till dinner-time. It was most improper, as I told his mother, and then we had a fight about it. I can't stand that sort of people, Bennett; they're low-bred and presuming, and directly they find a cause for quarrel, their bad blood comes to the front. I shall never call upon Lady Wilson again.'

'No, my dear lady; I hope you won't. You've been too good and condescendingly to her already. And you mustn't think no more of Mr Wilson either. He ain't worthy of the likes of you!'

'Dear me, no! Of course that's all over. And poor Colonel Ellerman too. It's enough to upset a woman (isn't it, Bennett?) losing two of them so near together, and so unexpectedly!'

'Ah! there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, ma'am; and, please the Lord! I shall live to see you riding over the heads of such people as the Wilsons yet.'

'Well, if I can only get Miss Fenella married and out of the way, I think I shall have as good a chance as any. By-the-bye, Bennett, as you go for the lobster, you might as well look in at the agents, and tell them to put the rooms on their books again. Say I'll let them on any reasonable terms, for I know I can't get a high rent at this time of the year. But I'm determined to take that girl abroad, Bennett, if I pawn my jewellery to accomplish it. After all, it would be worth my while, for I could get it out again as soon as ever she was married.'

Filled with this new idea, Mrs Barrington became so friendly and confidential with her daughter, that Fenella (remembering her first reception) was agreeably surprised. She did not know the little plot that was hatching beneath her mother's flattering notice of her beauty or her talents. She believed it to be genuine. And so, in part, it was. Mrs Barrington

could not live without some excitement, and Fenella's improved appearance had suggested a new excitement to her. Having a handsome *demoiselle à marier* to take about and add a fresh attraction to her own society, was a different thing altogether from being annoyed by the presence of a half-formed school-girl, whom no man would wish to own either by marriage or adoption. And the notion having once entered her head, she became crazy to put it into execution.

Fenella was pleased and startled, at first, by her mother's cordiality towards her; but as the days went on without bringing tidings of Geoffrey Doyne, her spirits began to sink. She had not the slightest doubt of her lover, but her heart was filled with every sort of fear for him. Was it possible, she thought, that he had never received her last letter from Inescedwyn? Was he still sending his to the old address? and was Martha too stupid to forward them to London? Could he

be ill, or dying?—(the ignorant imagine no greater calamity than death can befall those whom they love)—or had his family refused their consent to his marriage, and was he afraid to come and break the news to her? These, and a hundred other doubts that made her heart sick with apprehension, surged and swayed through Fenella's bosom, until she felt as if she must seek Geoffrey out at all hazards, and learn the truth. But that the truth could involve anything worse than annoyance, or delay, never entered her mind. *How could it*—with Geoffrey?

Her mother and she kept very close to the house during those few days of suspense. Mrs Barrington (who was naturally lazy and untidy) never appeared *en grande tenue* unless there was something to be gained by it, and considered a soiled dressing-gown the proper costume to wear during a month when nobody was likely to call, and there was no object in showing herself abroad. She sat indoors,

therefore, all day fanning herself, and making calculations for her proposed autumn manœuvres; whilst Fenella read novels from the circulating library, or the contents of the newspapers, aloud to her.

One evening during the first week they spent in London, the girl was sitting with a very heavy heart, trying thus to amuse her mother. She had stolen out that afternoon, and slipped a letter in the post herself — imploring Geoffrey to let her know at once whether he had received the news of her arrival in town. And now she felt almost numbed by the suspense of waiting for an answer, as if life or death hung on the chance of her receiving it by return of post.

'I think that story's abominably stupid,' said Mrs Barrington presently. 'The man's a stick, and the woman's a goody. Don't you think so, Fenella?'

'Eh! what, mamma? Oh yes, I do!' exclaimed Fenella suddenly, as she caught the meaning of her mother's words.

'I don't think you're enjoying it much more than I am, my dear, and I don't wonder at it,' resumed Mrs Barrington. 'The last chapter has been a perfect sermon, and I hate preaching, especially in a novel. Suppose you read me the paper instead? I haven't had time to look at it today. You'll find the *Standard* on that table.'

Fenella put down the novel and rose to fetch the paper, with that heart-sickening suspense (which those who have experienced the feeling will best recognise) still uppermost in her mind.

'Let's have the epitome of news,' said Mrs Barrington, as the girl reseated herself. 'Or stay, Fenella; read the list of marriages and deaths first. Not the births, my dear (nobody cares about births except the people concerned; they're much too common); but you see lots of names amongst the marriages and deaths of people you have heard of, though you may not know. Just run over the names as they stand, Fenella; that will be quite

enough. Dear me! I wish my sight were not so weak by gas-light. It makes me feel quite an old woman to be so dependent on others.'

The girl began to read as she was ordered :—Adams—Messiter; Arbuthnott —Clive; Barclay—Smith; Cadogan—Matthews; Doyne—Robertson. And there she stopped.

'Go on, my dear,' said her mother somewhat impatiently.

But Fenella did not go on. Her eyes were staring in a blank vacuous manner at the following words :—

'August 3rd, at the Church of St Mary le Strand, by the Rev. ——, Geoffrey Doyne, Lieut. H.M. XXX. Regiment of Hussars, second son of Jasper Doyne, J.P., of Ryelands, in the county of Buckinghamshire; to Jessie, fourth daughter of James Robertson, M.D., of 44 Blenheim Square, W.C.'

Mrs Barrington could not stand the suspense.

'Do go on, Fenella,' she repeated irritably; 'it drives me wild when people stop in the middle of reading in that way. Whatever have you got there—anything interesting?'

But all the answer she received was conveyed by the sound of a heavy fall. Fenella had fainted on the floor. At this sight Mrs Barrington became terribly alarmed. She was a woman who lost all presence of mind in an emergency.

'Bennett! Bennett!' she screamed, flying to the door, 'come down here at once. Miss Fenella has fainted.'

The servant was in the room in a minute, and kneeling beside the unconscious girl.

'Why, bless my heart alive!' she exclaimed, 'how did this happen?'

'I don't know, I'm sure,' wailed Mrs Barrington; 'she was reading the *Standard* to me only a minute ago, when she suddenly fell on the floor. Oh dear! oh dear! I hope she's not going to take to

fainting; it's the most tiresome habit a girl can have; you never know when it'll come on. Did you see anything of this in the country, Bennett?'

'Bless you, no, ma'am! And don't go to frighten yourself; it's only an accident. Young ladies will faint sometimes. It's the heat of the weather most likely, or Miss Fenella has over-tired herself. We must lay her down flat, that's the best way; and please to give me the eau de Cologne and your fan, and I'll soon bring her to.'

But though Eliza Bennett made every effort to restore Fenella to consciousness, twenty minutes elapsed, and still the girl lay, rigid as stone and white as a broken lily, prostrate upon the ground.

'I don't like this, ma'am,' said Bennett, shaking her head as she found her restoratives had no effect. 'I am afraid it is more than an ordinary swoon. Don't you think we'd better send round for Dr Metcalfe?'

'It *surely* can't be necessary,' replied her mistress. 'Oh! don't tell me there's more trouble in store for us, Bennett, and I'm to have a doctor's bill added to my other worries. Dash some more water in her face. I'm sure she blinked last time you did it. Perhaps she's only shamming. Girls *will* sham sickness, you know, sometimes. They think it's interesting!'

'Miss Fenella ain't shamming,' said the servant indignantly; 'and indeed, ma'am, you *must* please to send Mrs Watson for the doctor, for I can't take the responsibility of this on myself any longer.

Mrs Barrington was frightened into concession, and the medical man, who lived close at hand, was soon in the room. He raised Fenella's head and looked in her face.

'Cut her dress and her laces,' he said curtly.

'Oh dear, sir, they're as loose as they can be!' remonstrated Bennett.

'Be good enough to do as I tell you,' was the reply; and when she had obeyed

him, he lifted the girl upon the couch, and laid his ear upon her chest.

'That will do,' he said presently, as he rose to his feet; 'and now, where is her bedroom? I will carry her up to bed.'

Bennett led the way, and Dr Metcalfe lifted the girl's slight figure in his arms, and followed her. The mother was left behind, wringing her hands in feeble lamentation.

'I hope to goodness this is not the beginning of an illness,' she thought selfishly, 'for it will ruin all my plans if Fenella goes and loses her good looks just as she requires them most.'

Presently she heard Dr Metcalfe's footstep descending the stairs again, and waited near the door in expectation of his entering to give her further information about her daughter. But he passed her landing and walked straight out of the house.

'Such extraordinary behaviour,' as Mrs Barrington said to her servant a few

minutes later; 'just as if I had no concern in the matter, and wasn't even the girl's mother! But what did he say upstairs, Bennett? Is this fainting fit a mere accident, or is it likely to occur again? I shall go mad if she takes to having them as a regular thing.'

'Oh no, ma'am! it won't be as bad as that; but I'm bound to say the doctor looked grave about it, and he'll see Miss Fenella the first thing to-morrow morning. It was terrible to watch her come-to, ma'am. I thought she was going out of her mind. But the doctor give her a powerful sleeping draught, and she dropped off like a child. But I don't think he likes the looks of her at all.'

'It is *I* that shall go out of my mind with all this worry,' cried Mrs Barrington. 'However, I don't believe she *can* be really ill with that lovely colour, and I daresay Dr Metcalfe is making all the fuss he can over it, just to run up a bill. It's the way with those doctors — once get

into their hands, and you never get out again.'

'I am afraid I must go back to Miss Fenella now, ma'am,' said Bennett; 'for the doctor's orders are that she's not to be left for a minute, and she's to stay in bed till after he's seen her to-morrow.'

'Of course,' replied Mrs Barrington petulantly. 'I knew how it would be. I'm to lose *you* now, and wait on myself, I suppose. Oh! these children! these children! what a plague and a nuisance they are, to be sure!'

But the affectionate mother enjoyed a good night's rest, notwithstanding her anxiety, although her servant sat beside her daughter's bed until the morning. The report she then made to her mistress was anything but reassuring.

'I can't make Miss Fenella out at all, ma'am,' she said; 'she opened her eyes a good while since, but she's never turned in her bed, nor spoken a word to me. She looks *fixed* like, and I do hope the

doctor will keep his promise to come and see her.'

The doctor did keep his promise, and at ten o'clock Bennett tapped again on her mistress's door.

'Dr Metcalfe is here, if you please, ma'am, and he's seen Miss Fenella, and he'd like to speak a few words with you before he leaves the house.'

'Very well, Bennett; just tie a ribbon in my hair, and give me that blue shawl. You must tell the doctor I'm *en deshabille*, you know; but I've been too terribly anxious about the dear child to think of my dress.'

Mrs Barrington repeated something to the same effect when the doctor entered her room, but was unable to extract a compliment from him in return. He took all her excuses literally.

'You have every cause for anxiety, madam,' he answered gravely, 'and I am afraid that what I have to tell you will increase instead of diminish it. I am

sorry to say that I find Miss Barrington in a very unsatisfactory state of health. I believe she has spent this summer away from you?'

'Yes; I sent her to Ines-cedwyn, a most charming place in Wales, under the charge of my own maid, who was formerly her nurse. I thought the dear girl required sea air, and so I forced myself to make the sacrifice of parting with her. But it is one of the healthiest spots in the world. Surely she cannot have contracted any illness there?'

'Miss Barrington's present attack, madam, is more mental than physical,' replied Dr Metcalfe, 'but I can tell you the cause from which it has sprung. You must not think I am meddling with your private affairs in speaking plainly, but I consider it my duty to let you know the truth.'

He posed himself opposite to her, with one arm leaning on the mantelpiece, whilst he entered into a detail of Fenella's symptoms.

Mrs Barrington listened to him in silence—an angry and indignant silence—feeling with each word he uttered that the fabric of her hopes crumbled into smaller atoms. Fenella with *une affaire de cœur;* the girl for whom she had formed such ambitious projects, breaking her heart for some nameless nobody in the wilds of Wales; *her* daughter, struck to the ground by some stupid flirtation that had made itself patent to the eyes of the first stranger she had called in to prescribe a soothing draught. It was too disappointing, too humiliating. At the idea of it Mrs Barrington went pale beneath her rage, and trembled from head to foot.

'I am afraid I have wounded you,' said Dr Metcalfe kindly, as he concluded, 'but it was impossible to help doing so. As her mother, I considered it only right that I should speak openly to you.'

'Oh yes! of course—of course,' stammered Mrs Barrington; and then she

added, 'I was just thinking of taking her abroad.'

The doctor caught at the idea.

'The very best thing you could do for her, Mrs Barrington. You must be aware that in these cases change of air and scene, and a little seclusion—unless, indeed, any attachment the young lady may have formed might be brought to a happy issue instead. But I am sure I need not hint at such alternatives to you. Your own heart and your affection for your daughter will prove better guides in such a contingency than any advice you could receive from strangers.'

But all Mrs Barrington said was,—

'I conclude there will be no further need of your attendance, Dr Metcalfe, and we shall leave town as soon as possible.'

'Certainly, madam! I had no intention of calling again. May I express a hope of seeing you and Miss Barrington at some future time, and under pleasanter circumstances?'

He gave her his hand as he spoke, and she thrust a fee into it.

'But it will be the last,' she thought angrily, as he disappeared; 'never shall he cross my threshold again after what he has said to me to-day.'

She sat for some time where the doctor had left her—too paralysed, apparently, to move or speak. The first thing that roused her from her reverie was the sound of the opening door. As it turned on its hinges. Eliza Bennett's face peeped wistfully into the room.

'Is the doctor gone, ma'am?' she demanded.

The question seemed to goad Mrs Barrington into action. She sprang to her feet, and confronted the terrified servant with the face of a fury.

'Is the doctor gone?' she repeated. 'Yes, he *is* gone; and do you know what he came to tell me? That you have been faithless to the trust I reposed in you, and that whilst I thought that

wretched girl upstairs was safe under your care, you let her go rushing all over the place by herself just as she chose, and making love to every cockney tourist that came in her way.'

'*I*, ma'am—*I?*' gasped Eliza Bennett, panic-stricken by the accusation. 'Oh, don't go to say that of *me*, ma'am, when you know I was laid up in my bed, unable to lift hand or foot for five weeks at a stretch, and knew no more of what was going on outside than the babe unborn.'

'Then you *ought* to have known,' thundered her mistress, 'or set some one else to look after her! You've behaved most treacherously to me, and all the harm that comes of this will be laid at your door.'

'But what has Miss Fenella done, ma'am? I'm sure if a young lady like her is not to be trusted on a beach alone, who is?'

'What has she done? It is you who

should be able to answer that question. Whom did she meet? Who did she see down there? What man has dared to make love to her? That is what I want to know.'

Bennett's thoughts flew at once to the gentleman in the Beach Bungalow—the letters and the locket; but she considered it her duty to Fenella to stand firm to her ground.

'Nobody, ma'am,' she answered; 'that *I'm* sure of! How *should* there be, when Ines-cedwyn's such a lonely place? We were the only visitors there this summer.'

'You'd better first hear what Dr Metcalfe has told me,' replied her mistress; and she repeated the statement of the medical man for the benefit of the servant.

Bennett's face became as white as chalk during the narration.

'Will you still insist in maintaining that you know nothing of the matter?' demanded Mrs Barrington angrily.

'I don't believe it's true—and I know nothing about it,' repeated the servant stoutly.

'I'll see if the girl is as obstinate as you are,' exclaimed her mistress, darting upstairs.

Bennett, fearing the scene that might ensue between the mother and daughter, followed her quickly, and reached the spot as soon as she did.

Fenella was standing in the centre of the room, supporting herself with one hand against the iron railing at the foot of the bed. The dressing-gown she wore was not whiter than her complexion; her hair was tossed in the wildest confusion over her breast and shoulders; her grey eyes had a scared and piteous look in them, as if she had just awakened from some hideous dream. It was evident that she had guessed, or overheard, the substance of the communication which Dr Metcalfe had made to her mother.

Mrs Barrington advanced upon the

trembling girl with the air of a virago.

'Well!' she exclaimed, in a shrill, coarse voice (it is astonishing how coarse the most delicate and apparently well-bred women can be when their tempers are raised), 'are you not ashamed to stand there staring at me in that brazen way, when the whole town is ringing with your disgrace? Do you know what the doctor has told me? Oh, don't pretend to shrink, and be extra modest, after the bold manner in which you have been conducting yourself. You're a nice young lady to be trusted to go about alone, flirting with every low fisherman you may meet upon the beach! Tell me the name of the man who dared to make love to you at Ines-cedwyn, you innocent piece of goods! you—'

But Fenella did not speak. She continued still and rigid as a figure of marble, with her eyes fixed upon vacancy.

'Do you hear what I say to you?' screamed Mrs Barrington. 'Tell me the

name of the man who presumed to make love to my daughter (though he never would have done so if you hadn't given him encouragement), and I will have him whipped through the streets like a hound. Henry Wilson would do it for me, if he were not a cur himself—or Colonel Ellerman, only he's dead. Good heavens! what did your father mean by dying in that stupid manner, and leaving us to look after such things for ourselves? Why haven't we a man to fight our battles for us? But you shall tell me the name of that fellow, or I'll shake it out of you.'

Still the girl's mouth did not unclose, and Bennett, who was watching her anxiously, saw her white teeth press upon her under lip until she made the blood come. It was evident that she was resolved to keep her own secret.

'Oh! you're obstinate, are you?' exclaimed Mrs Barrington, 'and you will try to defy me! You think you can bring all this trouble upon our heads with impunity;

that you can go tumbling about the house and fainting, and being threatened with a brain attack, for the sake of some disgraceful love affair that you ought to be ashamed to think of; and I'm to pass it over, and take you to my arms again, and say you're a very good girl! I'll tell you *what* I say, and that is that you're a born idiot! Just as I was going to take you to Paris or Brussels, too, and introduce you to society! And now, you may be ill for months, you ungrateful, wicked girl! But I am not going to be fooled by you! You shall tell the name of that man, if you die for it.'

She advanced threateningly upon the passive figure of Fenella as she spoke, and Bennett laid her hand upon her arm.

'She's really ill, ma'am,' she whispered. 'Pray be careful what you do to her; you may bring on another attack.'

But her mistress was in no mood to accept advice. She shook off Eliza

Bennett's touch as if it had been that of a scorpion.

'Leave me alone! How dare you interfere?' she said angrily. 'I shall deal with my own daughter as I choose;' and then she turned again upon the girl. 'Do as I order you!' she exclaimed. 'Tell me the name of your lover at once, or I'll strike you!' and, lifting her arm, she brought it down with her utmost force against the white, sad face that confronted her.

Fenella did not utter a word of entreaty or remonstrance. She only shivered violently as the blow descended, and, sitting down upon the nearest chair, passed her own hand in a sort of wondering way across her eyes and forehead.

'Oh, Lor', ma'am! you do frighten me!' said Bennett. 'Let her be, my dear lady, at least for the present. She ain't in a fit state to listen to you; indeed, she ain't!'

'It's evident whose side *you're* on,' replied her mistress witheringly; 'but you'll do the girl no good by your partisanship, and that I can tell you. She has behaved in a manner to disgrace us all; and if she were dead and cold in her coffin, it would be the best thing that could happen to her.'

Then, for the first time, Fenella found her voice.

'Oh, mother! mother!' she wailed, 'pity me.'

But she might as well have appealed to a stone.

'*Pity you!*' repeated Mrs Barrington, with a sneer. '*Despise* you, you mean. You won't find many to pity you for having ruined all your prospects in life. They will only laugh at and ridicule you for being such a fool. But if this lover of yours is a gentleman, and can be called to account for his treachery to you, he shall. If you want me to pity

you, you must tell me his name; and, as your mother, I command you to do so.'

But Fenella had again relapsed into silence. Eliza Bennett tried the effect of coaxing.

'Come, my dear,' she said; 'I dare-say it'll be hard-like, but you'd better confide everything to your mamma. She's your best friend, Miss Fenella, and it's useless trying to keep the truth back from her.'

The girl shook her head.

'It wouldn't be any good,' she said simply.

'Nonsense!' replied Mrs Barrington. 'A child like you is no judge of such matters, and, as Bennett tells you, I am your best friend. Come, Fenella, tell me this man's name, and if things can be set right between you, they shall. I am sorry I slapped you, but you really are too provoking. However, I'll look over everything that has

passed between us, if you will place confidence in me now.'

And Mrs Barrington, who was intensely curious in the matter, lowered her head so that her daughter might whisper in her ear.

'It would be useless,' repeated Fenella, in a low voice of pain.

'Why useless? Your obstinacy surpasses anything I have ever seen for a girl of your age. I tell you it is *not* useless. What makes you persist that it is so?'

'Because — because *he is married*,' said Fenella, with an effort that seemed to drag at her very heart-strings.

'*Married!*' screamed Mrs Barrington. 'The disgraceful, dishonourable creature! And *you*, you shameless girl! what did you mean by letting a married man make love to you? I never heard of such abominable iniquity in all my life before. Here! have I lived to the age of thirty years, or a little over, and

travelled about the world, and seen all sorts of people, and it is left for my own daughter, a child of sixteen, to initiate me into the horrors of vice! Bennett, get me a glass of wine! get me brandy! get me anything that may help me to drown this terrible remembrance! Or, stay! Let me leave the room. I cannot breathe this atmosphere any longer! *A married man!* That I should have lived to hear such a thing! I, who have had but one aim throughout my sorrowful life—to keep myself and my child unspotted from the world. May Heaven forgive you, Fenella!'

And with this solemn adjuration, Mrs Barrington swept out of the room.

As soon as she had quite disappeared, Eliza Bennett advanced to the side of her young mistress. Fenella was seated where her mother had left her—still, white, and silent, with her piteous grey eyes staring at the opposite wall. The

servant laid her rough hand on the girl's soft fingers.

'Pray to God, Miss Fenella,' she said gently. 'He loves you, my dear; He will hear you. Pray to Him, and maybe prayer will bring you comfort.'

Fenella lifted her eyes to those of the old woman wearily.

'*Is* there a God, nurse?' she asked. '*I doubt it.* The reverend mother in the convent used to tell me to pray to the good God, and He would protect me from all harm; and I have prayed to Him regularly, morning and evening, since. But I think He must have stayed behind in the convent, nurse. I don't think He came out into the world—with me.'

CHAPTER IV.

OVER.

'She had fallen in her own sight—not because he had loved her, but because he had left her.'

Ariadne.

IN the heart of the Wallon there lies a little village called Sainte Pauvrette, which is a mass of flowers and sweet-smelling herbs in summer, and a mass of snow and ice in winter. It possesses no baths, no mineral springs, no objects of historical interest — nothing, in fact, wherewith to tempt a visitor except its climate and its flowers. Tourists who know something of the country, and wish to get out of

the beaten track of overdone cathedrals and exhausted picture-galleries, go to Sainte Pauvrette in the warm weather, when the hillside is covered with lemon-scented thyme and feathery sorrel and ruddy clover, and the surrounding country is redolent of lilies and roses and honeysuckle; but no one ever dreams of remaining there throughout the winter. When the snow falls, Sainte Pauvrette is left to the few peasants who till its fields and pray in its dirty little chapel. The wooden building that calls itself a hotel is boarded up and left to take care of itself; and the residents who have rooms to let, lock the doors and retreat to the lower regions, burrowing like moles until the sunshine shall tempt them to the upper world again.

But one day not two months after the events recorded in the last chapter, the inhabitants of Sainte Pauvrette were astonished by the arrival of two English ladies, who, with their maid, took up their quarters

in one of the small furnished houses that had just been vacated by the summer visitors, and appeared disposed to settle themselves down there for the winter. The season of Sainte Pauvrette was over; the autumn, with its usual risk of fever and malaria, was close at hand; the rooms for hire had been cleaned and shut up for the next six months — and the people of Sainte Pauvrette would as soon have expected their patron saint to appear among them, and demand lodgings for the winter, as to see any more visitors. The circumstance was so unusual and startling that it caused endless talk amongst the villagers, and Madame Regnier (who was the lucky person to let her house to the new-comers) began to think she must be under the especial care of Providence, and that a miracle had been performed in her behalf. But the strangers—Mrs Barrington, Fenella, and Eliza Bennett — kept entirely to themselves, and did not appear disposed

to satisfy the curiosity of their neighbours. The tradespeople, who were chiefly small farmers, selling their own milk, bread, vegetables, and poultry, tried their best to extract some information from Eliza Bennett, but she was invulnerable. Either she could not or she would not understand what they said to her, and never did more than haggle with them over the prices of their merchandise, and carry off her bargains in her market basket. But the ladies were often seen about the village, and many were the conjectures made as to the reason of their sojourn there.

The young lady was sick. Sainte Pauvrette decided that point very speedily. And it was supposed that her mother had brought her to the village for the sake of her health. The peasants soon grew to recognise and smile at the sweet, sad face of Fenella as she passed amongst them, and to talk of the girl who sat sometimes motionless for hours

on the hillside, looking at the horizon with a weary, impassive expression that made their hearts ache.

There were rumours, too, that the mother and daughter did not get on very well together, and Madame Jeanne, the proprietress of the wooden hotel (whose offers of accommodation Mrs Barrington had peremptorily refused), had a good deal to say to her neighbours on the subject of that lady's treatment of Fenella.

'*Ma foi!*' she would exclaim, as she lounged against the outside wall of her house, knitting stockings of coarse yarn, and surrounded by a bevy of women, all knitting as if their lives depended on it,—'*ma foi!* but I wouldn't be the daughter of that Englishwoman for a great deal. She has a tongue the length of a cow's tail; you may hear it from one end of Sainte Pauvrette to the other. And it's my belief that when she gets into a rage, she beats her!'

'You don't mean to say that!' cried her neighbours, as they drew closer.

Madame Jeanne nodded her head oracularly.

'But I do! The screams that came from that house the other night were fearful. You might have thought there was murder being committed there, and so I told the English servant—bah! what an ogre she is! with never a smile nor a pleasant look on her face—and she said her young lady was subject to hysteria. But I don't believe that. The mother beats her! take my word for it.'

'The young lady certainly looks very sad,' interposed another woman. 'She has the face of an angel, and the air of a martyr. I was watching her yesterday morning. She sat for two hours on the bench by the ruined chapel without moving. And in this cold weather too! It is not natural that a young girl should neither jump nor run. But I do not think she could be merry if she tried. She has a face full of care and

sorrow. And she cannot be more than seventeen or eighteen years old.'

'It is *Madame sa Mère* that gives her that face,' rejoined Madame Jeanne. 'She is a fury, a virago, a devil, that woman, and capable of anything that is bad.'

'She pays the rent regularly, and they are quiet and respectable tenants,' said Madame Regnier, who was naturally on Mrs Barrington's side, 'and you only spread these tales about them, Madame Jeanne, because they would not take rooms in your wooden hotel. And they were quite right too! It is draughty enough in winter to kill a delicate *demoiselle* like Miss Barrington. But you have no right to speak against them on that account; and if you say more, I will inform Père Antoine of your behaviour, and have you openly rebuked for scandal.'

'Bah, pig!' cried Madame Jeanne, opening her black eyes at Madame Regnier, with a *moue* of disdain; 'go to—! Tell the priest and whom you will; but all

your talking will not alter matters. Everybody in Sainte Pauvrette has heard the quarrels that go on in that house! It was only the other day that mademoiselle ran out of it bareheaded, with a great angry red mark across her face, and would have traversed the village so, had not the ogre servant appeared and pulled her indoors again. They ill-treat *la petite*, I tell you! She is sick and ailing, poor child—consumptive, most likely, like all those English; and they make her miserable. I have seen the tears pouring down her face like rain. It is a pity she has no father to defend her! A man is bad enough when he takes a spite against you, and knocks you about; but, *ma foi!* he is nothing to a woman. A bad woman is a devil, and nothing less, and your Madame Barrington is a bad woman, and I say it!—eh, Madame Regnier? You had better go at once and tell Père Antoine so, and I'll repeat it to his face. What d'ye make of that?'

'She pays her rent regularly,' grumbled Madame Regnier, 'so it's not my place to speak against her. And as for the rest, Madame Jeanne, we must each think what we choose about it.'

Whatever they chose to think could hardly have been worse than the reality. The autumn and winter months which she passed in Sainte Pauvrette were such a tumultuous mixture of anger, strife, reproaches, and hopeless misery, that Fenella Barrington, through all the rest of her weary life, could never look back upon them without a shudder—as a man who has passed days and nights of suspense tossing about the cruel ocean, living in the very shadow of death, and beaten upon by all the storms of heaven, might look back and wonder he still lived to tell the tale.

Her mother's conduct to her at this period was the very refinement of cruelty. Had she only struck the wretched girl—as she too often did to satisfy her own

feelings of rage and disappointment—it would have been as nothing compared to the sneers and reproaches and abuse cast at the absent, which were so much harder to bear. And Fenella could not say a word in defence of herself or him. She was condemned to sit and hear it all in silence, whilst she pressed her hands upon her aching bosom where the image of Geoffrey Doyne (though shattered into fragments) was still cherished as the holiest thing she had ever possessed.

How often, whilst the villagers of Sainte Pauvrette watched her sitting on the hill-side, motionless for hours, she was longing to die—praying, in a sort of half-conscious way, that God would send down His Angel of Death to take her out of a world which had opened upon a scene of so much perplexity and trouble for her.

But Fenella hardly knew what she really wished for. The present and the future were alike blanks. All she knew for certain was that Geoffrey Doyne had

passed out of her life—that he belonged to another woman—that she should never see him again, nor hear his voice; and the mere fact of this knowledge was too wonderful a mystery for her to fathom. For she did not even know how it had happened, or why. Not a line, not a sound, had reached her since she had read the public announcement of his marriage; and sometimes she would wonder, in a vague, childish way, if it had been all a dream, and pinch her arm, with a sad smile, to see if she were real. But then remembrance would rush back upon her—rush back with a feeling of shame and horror that would flood her pale cheeks with crimson, and retreat as suddenly, leaving them white with despair.

Eliza Bennett felt deeply for her young mistress during her illness. Though the people of Sainte Pauvrette found her curt and harsh of speech, she only assumed that manner to cover her emotion. She could hardly trust herself to think

of Fenella, far less to speak of her. Had she been left to her own devices, she would have been the tenderest of nurses and comforters to the forlorn and unhappy girl, but Mrs Barrington would not permit it. She had her own reasons for keeping up a sense of her ingratitude and folly in Fenella's breast. She wanted to force her daughter to throw off the disappointment and depression under which she laboured, and make her thankful to rush back into the world as soon as she was strong enough to do so.

She tried to explain her motives to Eliza Bennett, but though the servant was afraid (in consequence) to show all the sympathy she felt for her young mistress, she could not approve of the harshness Mrs Barrington displayed towards her. She often attempted to stand between the mother and daughter on the occasion of those sad quarrels, which had made themselves patent to the ears of Sainte Pauvrette; but she found that her inter-

ference only made matters worse, and her best plan was to preserve neutrality.

One terrible night, however, when the frosts of December and January had covered the country with a pall of white, and the snow lay several feet deep in the lower parts of the village, an altercation—which commenced (on Mrs Barrington's part) with covert sneers and words of contempt, and culminated in loud tones of anger and several smart blows—had nearly proved the end of poor Fenella's troubles.

She stood before her mother, half fainting from fear, and without a word to say in self-defence, until the indignities offered her, and the abuse cast upon one whom (though unnamed) she could not hear reviled with impunity, sent all the blood in her body rushing to her brain, and deprived her of the mastery over her senses. With a loud cry to God for mercy, and before Mrs Barrington (being alone) could prevent

the action, Fenella had flown bareheaded from the house, and flung herself into a sluggish stream, half ice and half water, which ran in front of it.

Then Mrs Barrington was thoroughly alarmed, and screamed to Eliza Bennett for assistance; and all the neighbours were roused by the disturbance, and brought lanterns and lighted pine torches to help in the search.

They had not to go far. The senseless figure of Fenella was soon found—thrown violently across the mixture of ice and muddy water of which the winter stream was composed; and being wrapped up in a blanket by Bennett, was carried back to the house and placed in bed. But the inhabitants of Sainte Pauvrette had plenty to say of the occurrence afterwards, and Madame Jeanne was not backward in giving her opinion on the matter.

'Did I not tell you what that English-woman was?' she exclaimed next day, when it was openly announced in the

village that the poor young lady was lying dangerously ill of a brain fever. 'A pig! a devil! for all the fine yellow curls that she keeps in a box, and the pretty pink colour she would have us believe to be her own! She has used that poor *demoiselle* shamefully ever since she came here, and now she wants to kill her—that is my belief! Else why does not she have a doctor to see her in this fever; and why has she sent away the ogre, Mademoiselle Elise, just when she wants her help most? Oh, but you need not stare at me in that manner! I only tell the truth, and Madame Regnier cannot deny it, although she *is* so anxious to make out her tenant to be everything that is good. Mademoiselle the ogre left Sainte Pauvrette this morning by ten o'clock. I met her walking on the road to Arniers to catch the *diligence*, with her large basket on her arm; and when I asked her the reason of her journey, she replied she had business to do for her mistress in Arniers.

But she has not returned, *mes dames*—she has not returned; and meanwhile *la belle petite* lies in bed with an attack of the brain, and no doctor is sent for to attend her; and Collette, who has been engaged to do their housework, is not permitted to go into the room, of which the door is kept locked by her mother. But if she dies,' continued Madame Jeanne, with a threatening shake of the head,—'if that beautiful young lady dies, without help or assistance, and after all the cruelty she has been subjected to, *I* shall say it is murder, for one—let who will be the other.'

Meanwhile what the irate hotel-keeper said was true. Eliza Bennett had gone that morning to Arniers; more, she had crossed to England. She and her mistress had been closeted all night with the unfortunate girl who had been rescued from the mud and the ice, and who only returned to consciousness to fall into a burning fever, and rave deliriously of the troubles which had occasioned it.

'This is the climax,' said Mrs Barrington, with a look of despair, and as if the climax had not been in a great measure brought on by herself. 'We must lock the door of her room, Bennett, and let no one but ourselves pass in and out. She talks in French, and I would not have these ignorant creatures overhear what she says for any mortal consideration.'

The two women consulted long and earnestly on what was best to be done in the matter; and when the morning dawned, the key unturned in the lock of Fenella's door, and Eliza Bennett, creeping out of it, with a white and troubled face, went up to her own room, and attired herself in her walking things.

In the space of a few minutes her mistress followed her, with a large basket on her arm.

'You will travel as quickly as ever you can,' she said, as she placed some money in her hands, 'and return to us as soon as possible. This fever is sure to abate

in a few hours, and I shall not keep Fenella here one day longer than is absolutely necessary.'

'Return to you, my dear mistress!' exclaimed the servant; 'why, what else should I do? Am I not taking this journey entirely for your sake and that of the dear child! Keep her as cool as possible, ma'am, and don't let her have anything but slops and fever drinks till I come back. I will be with you at the end of a week again, without fail.'

Mrs Barrington sat down and began to cry feebly.

'I don't know what I shall do without you,' she wailed; 'it's horrible to sit and listen to her ravings and reproaches; but I am sure it is best that you should go to England at once, and then the business will be over. But you are a dear, good, valuable creature Bennett, and I shall count the minutes till you come back again.'

She kissed the servant on both cheeks as she spoke, and Eliza Bennett went on

her way rejoicing. She crossed to Dover the same day, and was at Ines-cedwyn by the following evening. It was evident that the business she had been entrusted to transact for her mistress was, in some manner, concerned with her brother Benjamin, and the place where Fenella had made that fatal acquaintance in the ruined bungalow, which brought ill-luck to all who meddled with it. There was no necessity for Eliza Bennett to remain in Ines-cedwyn after she had obtained the information which she came to seek. She was anxious to rejoin her mistress, and the associations of her birthplace had become distasteful to her.

She had adhered faithfully, however, to the business upon which Mrs Barrington had sent her to England, and been careful not to say a word about her young lady's illness, or the cause. She was, therefore, considerably startled the next morning, as she was preparing to leave the cottage, to hear Martha say,—

'By the way, 'Liza, do you remember the talk as there was here last summer about Miss Fenella having got a beau? Well, I expect that young feller's bin hangin' about here again in hopes of gettin' another sight of 'er. *I* don't know 'im, of course, no more than Adam, but Tugwell the boatman says he has met 'im several times in Lynwern; and the day before yesterday, when I came back from Freshpool (where I had gone about some eggs), my servant girl told me as a gentleman had called to see me, and seemed quite put out like by my being from home. He was a fine-lookin' feller too, the girl says—tall and 'ansome; and it may have been 'im, and it may not, but it seems likely—now don't it?'

Eliza Bennett turned white and red under this exordium, as if she had been accused of having a '*beau*' herself.

'It ain't of much consequence one way or the other,' she replied, trying to speak indifferently; 'my young lady looks higher

than that comes to. You don't suppose she would think twice of a beau as she picked up on the Ines-cedwyn sands?'

'Lor', no! in course not; only I thought I might as well mention it to you. Well, good-bye, 'Liza, and thank you for thinking of us in this matter, and thank your mistress, too, for the recommendation. And I shall hear from the parties, I suppose, in a few days. I'm glad to have 'ad this peep at you, though you don't look over and above well, to my mind; but I 'opes you'll get over safe to your ladies, and that it won't be long afore you're all back in England again.'

'Oh yes! we shall be home in the summer, never fear! Good-bye to you, Martha,' said Eliza Bennett, as she set off to walk to Lynwern.

She plodded along the country road, over ruts hardened by the ice and snow, with her head bent down upon her bosom, and her mind filled with her sister-in-law's communication.

'I'd like to catch him hangin' about any place as *we* was in,' she thought indignantly; '*I'd* let 'im know what was what —the dirty, mean, sneaking scoundrel, to go and leave a poor girl in that way, and cause us all this misery! I only wish I had the handling of him! *I'd* make him pay for his whistle.'

She was so absorbed in her dreams of revenge that she stumbled up against some one in the road, before her brother Benjamin's cottage was out of sight, and had to draw back with a demand for pardon.

'It is of no consequence,' replied a sweet, grave voice; 'but I think I am speaking to Mrs Bennett, am I not?'

The woman looked up quickly. Before her stood a gentleman—young, handsome, tall and upright—a gentleman whom she had never seen before except by the uncertain light of the moon, but whom she recognised at once. It was, in fact, Geoffrey Doyne; and so great in the magic of

beauty, and a superior station, and another sex, that, as Eliza Bennett looked at him, all her deep-laid plans of revenge melted into thin air.

'No, sir,' she answered, in a voice that palpably trembled, 'I am not *Mrs* Bennett; I am her sister-in-law, Eliza Bennett.'

'*Eliza Bennett!*' he repeated quickly; 'is it possible? Are you the person—the maid—that accompanied a young lady down to Ines-cedwyn last summer?'

'Yes, sir, I am,' said Eliza stoutly. ('He's very handsome, the villin!' she thought to herself, 'and he's got a winning way with his tongue, drat it! but he sha'n't get any information of her whereabouts out of me—not if he was to drag me at the tail of four wild 'orses.')

'Oh! then you can tell me where she is?' exclaimed Geoffrey Doyne excitedly. 'Give me her address, I beg of you, in Heaven's name! I have a particular—a *very* particular reason for wishing to obtain it.'

The servant looked him full in the face.

'And I may have a particular reason, sir, for wishing to keep it from you; for, if I'm not greatly mistaken, you are the same gentleman that used to meet my young lady down on the sands here last summer.'

Geoffrey Doyne's eyes fell before hers.

'Yes,' he answered, in a low voice, 'I am the same.'

'Well, may God forgive you for it,' said the woman, 'for *I* can't. You've ruined her life as surely as ever a man ruined a woman! And I brought her up from a baby; she is like my own child to me. You might as well have killed me at the same time; I couldn't have felt it more,' and Eliza Bennett caught up her woollen shawl to wipe away two large tears that were rolling down her cheeks.

At her words Geoffrey Doyne became pallid with fear.

'Killed her! ruined her!' he repeated vehemently, as he caught the servant by

the arm; 'in God's name tell me what you mean! Is she ill — is she dead? What have I done? If you don't put me out of this suspense, I shall go mad!'

They were just opposite the Beach Bungalow as he spoke. Eliza Bennett glanced at it significantly.

'Come in here, sir,' she said,—'I don't want the whole village to hear what I've got to say to you—and I'll tell you what you've done.'

She led the way into the ruined villa, and Geoffrey Doyne followed her, sick at heart with remorse and apprehension.

'May I make so bold, sir,' began Eliza Bennett, as soon as they were sheltered from observation, 'as to ask if—so be —you're married?'

'Yes!' he replied; 'I am.'

'And what's the good, then, of your hanging about Ines-cedwyn to try and see my young lady? What could you say to her—how could you look at her, if you did meet?'

'Oh, I don't know—I cannot tell!' he exclaimed wildly. 'Only the separation, the silence, the want of seeing her is more than I can bear. If you will only tell me where she is, or take a letter to her, that I may have one word of kindness, one word of pardon in reply, I fancy I could bear the rest with fortitude. Mrs Bennett, I ought to have gone back to India long ago. My leave was up in the autumn, but I got an extension, only for this — to find out her address and see her once before I go. Then I will leave England and trouble her no more.'

'You will never get your wish through me, sir,' said Eliza Bennett, 'for I'll neither tell you where she is, nor carry any notes between you. You've done her enough mischief already, and you've put it out of your power to do her any good. The best thing you can do now, for her and yourself, is never to write to her nor see her any more.'

'But does she ever speak of me? Does she remember me?' he demanded eagerly.

'*Remember* you!' echoed the servant, in a tone of contempt. 'I should think you'd given her enough cause to remember you, in this life and the next too! But there are different sorts of remembrance, sir, and if my young mistress is the lady I take her for, her best remembrance of you will be one of hatred and of scorn!'

'I deserve it,' he answered brokenly.

'And so you do,' said Bennett, with the want of delicacy that usually characterises her class, 'and so you'll say twice over when you've heard what I've got to tell you.'

And thereupon she gave him an account of Fenella's mental and bodily sufferings during the autumn and winter, sparing no detail that might add to the colouring of the picture, and winding up with a description of her attempt at

self-destruction, and the brain fever that had succeeded it.

'And now, what do you think of yourself, sir?' she said, as she concluded. 'You're a nice sort of gentleman, aren't you, to ask me to carry notes to that poor suffering angel, and rake up all her troubles afresh, just as she has a chance maybe of getting over them. We'd never have known your *name* even, if it hadn't been for her delirious ravings; but we sha'n't forget it in a hurry, you may take your oath of that! And don't you attempt to come nigh her again, sir—not for the rest of your mortal life, —for I do believe her mamma would tear you limb from limb if you did.'

Geoffrey Doyne during her relation had shown every symptom of the deepest feeling. His brow had flushed darkly with shame, his nostrils had quivered, his lips grown white, his whole frame shaken with emotion. And now that it was concluded, all he seemed able to

do was to lean against the window-sill, whilst the words, '*My God! my God!*' seemed to be wrung from the very depths of his tortured heart. His suffering was so self-evident that even Eliza Bennett could not help pitying him.

'Don't take on like that, sir,' she said soothingly; 'it won't mend the past, and the best thing we can all do now is to try and forget it. I don't know, I'm sure, as I've done right to tell you so much; but it'll be safe with you, and I thought as you ought to know what my young lady has gone through. Maybe it will save others, for you gentlemen don't seem to stand at nothing when you've set your mind upon a thing. But I didn't mean to upset you like this, sir, and I beg your pardon if I've gone too far.'

'No, no! I should wish to have known it,' he said huskily; and then he pulled out several pieces of gold from his waistcoat-pocket, and tried to thrust

them in her hand. But she put them back again proudly.

'No, Mr Doyne. I couldn't take *your* money, thank you; not even if I'd done anything to deserve it, which I haven't. But I hope you'll give me your promise before you go never to try and write to Miss Fenella again. Don't make the harm you've done, worse, sir. You've got your own lady to consider and to look after now, and you can't do no good to mine! Will you promise me this?'

'Yes—I promise!' he said, in a broken voice.

'And please not to walk alongside of me to Lynwern either, sir! Meeting of you has upset me more than I care to think of, and I'd like to be alone for the rest of the journey.'

'I will respect your wishes,' replied Geoffrey Doyne quickly; and then, raising his hat, as if she had been his equal, he left the ruined bungalow, and strode along

the cliffs in the opposite direction to Lynwern.

Eliza Bennett looked after him for a few moments before she pursued her own way.

'Well, he may be a villin, but he's a fine-looking gentleman,' she thought as she dried her eyes, 'and they would have made a handsome couple. What a thousand pities it is that Miss Fenella couldn't have him. But there! it's always the way in this world. Them as ought to come together, don't; and them as 'ates each other like poison, is tied for life. The more I sees of marriage, the more thankful I am as I was never tempted into it!'

She pursued her road to Lynwern after this, and proceeded on her journey back to Sainte Pauvrette. And a few hours later Geoffrey Doyne followed her to London, and walked into the presence of his wife. They were living at an hotel, preparatory to going back to India. There was no lack of love on the part of Mrs Geoffrey

Doyne towards her husband, and (except when dark thoughts of Fenella Barrington interposed between them) he usually returned her ebullitions of affection with a certain degree of interest. It is difficult for a young and ardent nature not to evince some feeling when clasped in the arms of a pretty woman who has every right to expect an adequate return. And Geoffrey Doyne had a very affectionate disposition. His fault was that he loved too much, not too little. He was passionate, moreover, and easily moved; and to be caressed, and flattered, and made much of, was almost a necessity to him. But on this occasion his wife found all her artifices to attract his notice, failures. He had been absent nearly a week, on some business of which she had not the faintest idea; and yet when he returned home, instead of being glad to see her again, and anxious to hear what she had been doing in his absence, he was morose, gloomy, and

dejected, complained of every dish that appeared on the dinner-table, and scarcely spoke a dozen words to her during the evening. Had she indulged his mood and left him to himself, she would have been rewarded by seeing the cloud gradually pass away (at all events, to outward view), but Jessie did not understand how to treat her husband.

That phantom of a former love, which he had once mentioned to her, was ever coming between them now, and she was always quick to ascribe his varying moods to regret that he had married her. For six months they had been husband and wife, but they were no nearer each other in love or confidence or friendship than they had been at first. Geoffrey accepted her attentions to him, and that was all.

Women are very apt to imagine that the possession of the beloved object is *everything*, and that they can bear the idea of a rival better if they know him to be, beyond all dispute, their own.

They too often live to find out they have deceived themselves. To be married to a person you love, but who does not love you, is very much like trying to grasp a bubble—each time your fingers close upon it you will find them still unsatisfied and empty.

'What is the matter, Geoffrey?' demanded Jessie, as he thrust away the wine decanters and leant back moodily in his chair. 'I never saw any one so disagreeable as you have made yourself to-night. If this is the effect of having a holiday, I should say you had better remain at home for the future. Where have you been?'

'It would not interest you to know,' Geoffrey.

'Oh, that is as good as saying that you don't intend to tell me! just as when you receive a letter and put it into your pocket without showing it to me, and declare it is on business that I can't understand.'

'Perhaps it is!'

'But I have a right to ask where you've been, and whom you've seen, Geoffrey: and if you refuse to tell me, I shall think the very worst.'

'That will only hurt yourself, Jessie. Aren't you content with having married me, with knowing that, wherever I go, you have a right to demand to follow? And can't you let me enjoy a few hours' liberty without pestering to ascertain exactly where I have spent them?'

'No, I can't! because I always suspect you go where that other girl lives (the girl you told me of, you remember); and I always *shall* suspect it when you go away alone in this mysterious manner, as long as ever I live. I know when you are thinking of her, too—when you pucker up your eyebrows, Geoffrey, and look gloomy, and speak in that horrible cross way; and you make me miserable—you know you do.'

'You make yourself miserable, you mean. However, if what you say is true,

don't recall her memory by mentioning the subject. I have already told you it is an unpleasant one to me.'

'Oh yes! because you wish you had married her instead of me; and you get wretched when you think of it. But it is most unfair of you to go and see her, behind my back; and everybody would say the same.'

'I have not been to see her,' replied Geoffrey, with visible annoyance.

'But you think of her — you cannot deny it.'

'Yes, I *do* think of her! A man has not absolute control over his thoughts.'

'A pretty confession for a married man to make!' pouted Jessie. 'Why don't you follow it up by saying that you love her still?'

The young man was fairly roused by this time.

'I don't deny it,' he answered petulantly. 'I do love her still.'

'And I suppose you'll end by running

away with her, and leaving me to go back to papa in Blenheim Square! It is shameful, scandalous! and she must be a wicked, vile creature to encourage you to forget your duty in this way.'

Geoffrey Doyne rose from his chair, and struck his hand upon the table with a force that made the glasses ring.

'Don't you dare to speak of her in such terms before me,' he said angrily. 'She is no more vile nor wicked than yourself. She is as pure and good a girl as ever walked God's earth, and you are the only person on whom there is any necessity to call "shame." You chose to hold me to my promise of marriage, when you knew that my heart was no longer mine to give you; and, therefore, the consequences must be on your own head. I *do* love that girl you mention, earnestly, faithfully, affectionately, and I *shall* love her to my life's end. There! you wished for the truth, and you have it. You exacted the payment of my bond to the last ounce of

flesh. But you can't have the blood, Jessie—*my heart's blood.* That belongs to another, and ever will do so. And now, if you wish to preserve the peace, you will drop this subject once and for ever, as it can never raise anything but strife between us.'

This was all the satisfaction that she obtained from him, and a few weeks after they were on their way together to rejoin his regiment in India.

About the same time Eliza Bennett led Fenella out for her first walk in the open air. The girl, although much pulled down by her illness, was on the high road to recovery, but she did not appear to have regained her spirits with her strength. The little Wallon children ran out of the cottages as she passed, with bunches of violets and primroses in their hands, and Fenella smiled sweetly at them as she accepted their offerings. But the smile was as sad as ever, and the grey eyes still looked wistful and scared; and

as, accompanied by her nurse, she dragged her steps up to the little churchyard, the peasant women shook their heads at one another, and said she would be carried there yet.

'You mustn't sit down, my dear,' said Eliza Bennett; 'it's too cold for that yet. But you've done bravely for a first attempt, and we shall have you stout and strong upon your legs again before many days is past. You will try and leave off fretting now, my dear young lady, won't you? for your own sake, and your mamma's, and all as love you.'

'Oh yes, nurse, I will try.'

'It's no use crying over spilt milk, Miss Fenella, and you're too young and pretty to have your whole life wasted for a first mistake. You must try and look at what's past in a sensible light, my dear; and you'll live to laugh over these times, I warrant you.'

The girl shivered, but she answered in the same words as before.

'Yes, nurse, I will try.'

Then Bennett lowered her voice.

'Miss Fenella dear, you won't mind what I'm going to say, but I couldn't help guessing his name on account of your raving after him so in your illness, and when I was in London the other day about some money business of your mamma's, I made a few inquiries—secret like—about him, and he's gone, my dear. He's left England for good and all, and you won't never see him, nor be troubled with him again; and that ought to be as great a comfort to you as anything else—oughtn't it, now?'

The blood had ebbed and flowed in Fenella's wasted cheeks, as Bennett spoke to her, like waves of white and crimson, and when the servant turned for an answer, she saw a bright hectic spot burning under each of her eyes. But the tone in which she spoke was very calm and deliberate.

'Thank you, nurse,' she said wearily.

'You meant it kindly, I know, but nothing is of any consequence to me now. Only, please remember (and I am sure you will, for my sake) that I would rather not hear you mention his name again. He is dead to me, nurse; I am dead; everything seems dead together. Don't forget that, and never speak to me on the subject more! And now take me home; I have made myself worse by coming here; the sooner my mother takes me away from Sainte Pauvrette the better.'

She cast the violets and primroses upon the grave by which she had been standing as she spoke, and then throwing her arm about Bennett's neck, turned from the spot without another word.

CHAPTER V.

SIR GILBERT CONROY.

'He that hath nature in him must be grateful,
'Tis the Creator's primary great law.'

Madan.

A MONTH after this date Fenella and her mother were settled in Paris, and mixing in all the dissipations of the French capital. Mrs Barrington had many acquaintances there, and having hired a suite of apartments in the very centre of the town, their lives soon became one round of gaiety. Theatres and operas, balls and conversaziones, followed one another in quick succession, and Fenella retired to bed

each night almost too weary to think. It was good for her, and it would be untrue to say that she did not, in a measure, enjoy the change. To depict either a man or a woman as brooding incessantly over their trouble, and never for a moment losing sight of it, to raise cheerful eyes to the light of Heaven, would be utterly unnatural. No one ever did so in this world and preserved his senses. The strain upon the nerves would be too great, and the mind would break down beneath it. Fenella often returned from the gay scenes into which her mother took her, to think how much more she would have enjoyed them had Geoffrey Doyne not proved unfaithful, and sob herself to sleep over the remembrance. Yet, whilst she was mixing in them, they distracted her thoughts, and drew her out of herself. The theatre was a wondrous revelation to her; the opera, a sublime delight; even at the balls and assemblies she began to take pleasure in the know-

ledge that she was admired, and that all men did not consider her so worthless a thing that they could take her up, and cast her aside, as the humour seized them.

Mrs Barrington had shown wisdom in her generation in making her daughter's sojourn in Sainte Pauvrette a time which she shuddered to recall. Anything which would expunge that terrible remembrance from her mind would have been welcome to Fenella; it may be supposed, then, how gladly she hailed the fresh scenes which opened before her, and how gratefully she accepted the salve they offered to her wounded vanity. For we are all mortal, and there is no doubt that trouble is easier to bear when we have less time to think about it. And it is well it is so, else the world would be full of lunatics and suicides. The man who receives a bullet during the heat of battle in his body, which the surgeons are unable to extract, will feel its presence to the last

day of his life, and at some times more than at others. A change in the weather or a derangement of his system will cause the pain to be as acute as on the day he was shot; and yet when the sun shines, and his blood is free from acid, he may go for months without remembering he ever encountered such an accident. So it is with our hearts. The mercy of God and the goodness of friends may dull the sense of injury or loss for months together, but it never totally disappears. If a lesser grief overtakes us, a lesser love becomes estranged, the old wound opens and bleeds afresh, the bullet stirs in the flesh, and we recognise the fact that we are maimed for life. Let us not grudge the wounded, then, their moments of forgetfulness, nor ridicule the trifles which may have the power to divert their thoughts.

To an older person, perhaps, white satin and pearls might appear an unworthy panacea for a disappointed affection; but to a young creature like

Fenella, who had never possessed anything but serge and cotton frocks before, they held their charm. She sighed, it is true, when she saw the pale loveliness, which Bennett had taken such pains to adorn, reflected in the looking-glass, and wondered, if Geoffrey could have seen her like that, if he would ever have forsaken her. Still, she preferred to be handsome rather than ugly, and could take a pride in her personal appearance, though her lover was not there to praise it. It was natural that she should do so, and it is of no use crying out against nature.

But there was one thing in which Fenella's faith had been utterly destroyed and could never be built up again, and that was her mother's love for her. Mrs Barrington would have had it otherwise. When she found that her daughter's beauty had not been destroyed by her illness—that she was, in fact, better looking than she had

been before, and that she made no objection to going out to dances and theatres every night, and wearing any sort of costume which was provided for her, Mrs Barrington's good temper began to revive, and she would have had Fenella share her rouge and powder and her hare's-foot, and forget all old injuries. But the girl was unable to do so. About the past she was as silent as the grave. She never mentioned Geoffrey Doyne, nor Ines-cedwyn, nor Sainte Pauvrette; but to blot out the memory of them was impossible. She could not forget her mother's harshness and cruelty, nor the sneers and contempt cast upon her when her heart was bleeding for one word of affection or sympathy. She saw Mrs Barrington in her true colours—worldly, selfish, and deceitful; and as long as she lived, Fenella could never set her up again on the pedestal her childish enthusiasm had raised for her. She

accepted her caresses without any exhibition of dislike; she thanked her for her compliments, and followed her wishes; but here the link between them ended. Mrs Barrington had brought her into the world, certainly; but Fenella, remembering Sainte Pauvrette, could never again think of her as her *mother.*

The word 'mother' is sacred. It holds within its couple of syllables a host of loving possibilities; and the woman who cannot sympathise with every pulsation of the life she gave, is not worthy of the name.

Fenella put the thought resolutely from her—it was only another trouble added to the load she bore—and tried to believe that the sweet dream she had once cherished was of a mother who had died when she was born.

Mrs Barrington was her adviser, and protector, and chaperon—everything that was needful in the world of fashion she

had entered, but something which she never wished to encounter when alone. At such times, a suspicious reserve and awkwardness would fall upon both mother and daughter, which warned them to make the interview as short as possible.

Mrs Barrington, however, was quite in her element again. Her ambitious views for Fenella had all revived (though she did not like to say too much about them to the girl herself), and she spared no pains nor expense to render her as attractive as she possibly could.

The pale loveliness of the English girl, which owed so much to her lofty bearing and look of serious innocence, soon began to be talked of in the Parisian *salons*, and more than one man of fashion was said to be a suitor for her hand.

But Mrs Barrington was very cautious who she admitted as a visitor to her own house. She had no intention of marrying Fenella to a penniless *attaché*, or an officer

dependent on his pay. She wanted to secure both a title and a fortune for her daughter, and the only admirer she had who combined these advantages was her own old acquaintance, Sir Gilbert Conroy.

Time had been—and not so very long ago either — when the fair widow had hoped to get Sir Gilbert for herself, but her chances had never had any existence except in her own brain, and she was sensible enough to perceive that, if she snubbed his advances to Fenella, he was not likely to ask for her mother's hand instead. Besides, the baronet's suit had great advantages. He was not a hot-headed boy, determined to have his own way at all hazards, and run the risk of a refusal by speaking too soon. He rather preferred the dignified old fashion of consulting the parents or guardians of the young lady he desired to make his wife, before he mentioned the subject to herself. And Mrs Barrington preferred this method of courtship also.

She knew Fenella's impulsive temperament, and her love of truth and honour; and she was terribly afraid of what her daughter might say to any young man who addressed her on the subject of marriage. If the preliminary matters were kept in *her* hands, she felt that she could smooth down any little unpleasantnesses that may have occurred in the past, so as to make them appear rather desirable experiences for a young woman than otherwise.

Sir Gilbert Conroy was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He was a man of birth and education, of almost courtly breeding and ultra-refinement. In age he was about five-and-thirty; in appearance he was fair and aristocratic, with hair cropped closely to his head, and rather bald about the temples, where he brushed it backwards; with a handsome nose, quiet blue eyes, and a thin-lipped mouth shaded by a small moustache. He was a man whom any woman might have

been proud to be connected with—but he was a man who would be severe in his judgments, and unforgiving where he was offended.

He had been struck with Fenella Barrington on the first occasion of their meeting at an embassy ball, and had assiduously followed up the acquaintance since. And the girl liked him—not with any idea of marriage (she had conceived a notion that it was impossible she could ever marry now), but as a pleasant acquaintance, who could talk more sensibly than the generality of men, and who always seemed delighted to meet her, and proud to be her partner for the evening!

But when Mrs Barrington first mentioned the possibility of her marrying Sir Gilbert Conroy, Fenella felt as if she had been struck with a sudden blow. It was the morning after they had attended a large party at the house of the Russian ambassador, and Eliza Bennett

announced to her young lady that coffee was waiting for her in her mamma's dressing-room.

'The mistress is too tired to go down-stairs, Miss Fenella; so she says, please will you go in and take it with her there.'

The girl threw on her *robe de chambre*, and obeyed the summons. Her cheeks were flushed from sleep; her eyes were languid; her fair hair hung in two thick plaits down her back.

'Really, child,' exclaimed Mrs Barrington, as she entered, 'you grow handsomer every day. It's no wonder Sir Gilbert is making such a fool of himself about you.'

Fenella laughed.

'Poor Sir Gilbert! Why is he to be called a fool for liking me, more than any one else?'

'Because he likes you more than any one else does. Surely, Fenella, you are not so blind as not to see that!'

The girl opened her eyes.

'Does he? I hope not!'

'And why so, my dear? Most young ladies would be proud of his preference. His title is one of the oldest baronetcies in England, and he has five thousand a-year on which to keep it up.'

'Oh, I don't mean that, mamma; I am aware he is rich; only—you know—it would be of no use his liking me, because I could never marry him—nor anyone! So I hope it is all fancy on your part.'

'What nonsense, Fenella. You must put such fantastical ideas out of your head. And as for its being my fancy that Sir Gilbert likes you, he has already asked my consent to his proposing for your hand.'

Fenella grew scarlet.

'Oh, mamma, did you tell him?'

'What?' cried Mrs Barrington sharply.

'About—about—what has happened you know.'

'Am I a born fool, or an idiot?' exclaimed her mother. 'No! *of course* I didn't tell him! What are you thinking of, Fenella?'

'Forgive me, mamma! I ought to have known without asking. You would not tell him, naturally, for my sake as well as your own. But what did you say, then?'

'I told him he had my heartiest wishes for his success, and he might propose to you whenever he liked.'

Fenella's distress was genuine.

'Oh, mamma, why did you do that, when you know I can have but one answer to give him? I *couldn't* marry him even if I liked him. How could I? You might have saved me from the ordeal of having to tell him so.'

'But you must tell him no such thing, Fenella, and I will not allow you to see Sir Gilbert again until I have talked you into a more sensible frame of mind. Now, my dear, do try and look at the matter in

a reasonable light. You *must* marry ; you know that!'

'No, indeed I don't. I never intend to marry. I have given up all thoughts of it—once and for ever.'

'And how do you suppose I am to support you, then?' exclaimed her mother. 'Do you think I have sufficient money to maintain a household, and provide you with dresses, and take you about to places of amusement, for the remainder of your life?'

Fenella stared.

'Yes, I thought so, mamma. Haven't we money? Didn't papa leave any behind him?'

'*Your papa!*' repeated Mrs Barrington witheringly. 'A fine provision he left us! The pension for a post-captain's widow, and a few thousands in the bank. Why, I spent that to the last farthing ages ago, and have nothing but my pension at the present time. I am going in debt for every mortal thing we use, and eat, and wear. And then you sit there and tell me

calmly that you never intend to marry! Why, it's flying in the face of Providence; it's condemning us both to perpetual poverty, and your mother to losing everything she possesses; for if I can't pay my bills, my creditors will certainly put in a distraint upon the furniture in South Audley Street.'

'Oh, mamma! mamma! why didn't you tell me of this long ago? Why have you dressed me up in expensive clothes, and taken me to all these fine places, when you could not afford it? I would rather have gone in sackcloth and eaten dry bread, than run you into such terrible difficulties!'

'Why have I done it, Fenella?' replied Mrs Barrington. 'Why, to procure you the very chance which you declare you shall throw away—to see you suitably married, and placed above the reach of poverty and care.'

'But how *can* I, mamma? Answer the question yourself. How *can* I?' said Fenella pleadingly.

'I suppose I can guess what you are alluding to,' replied her mother coldly; 'but if you intend to let that foolish love affair stand in the way of your future prospects, all I can say is that you will be intensely selfish. Most people would think you had caused me sufficient trouble and anxiety already, without making more. If you are really sorry for what is past, Fenella, now is your time to redeem it. You will never have a better chance.'

'Oh, I *am* sorry,' returned the girl, with troubled eyes and clasped hands; 'God knows I am! But how can I remedy it? You know my heart is broken, mother; that my whole life is spoiled. What man would marry me now, if he knew the truth?'

'No one, of course! Very few men would marry at all if they knew the truth about the women they make their wives. But who do you suppose will tell Sir Gilbert Conroy anything? I sha'n't—you may take your oath of that; and

our dear good Bennett is as secret as the grave. There is no fear of his ever knowing the truth. You may set your mind entirely at rest on that point.'

'But I wouldn't accept him unless he knew it,' said Fenella. 'Mamma, what do you take me for? Do you think I could be so false, so dishonourable as that?'

Mrs Barrington wheeled round in her chair and regarded her daughter with the utmost astonishment.

'Fenella,' she said solemnly, 'you're a born fool, and where you get it from beats my comprehension. If you are going to enter into marriage with the idea of telling your husband everything that has ever happened to you, or that ever will happen to you, you may dismiss at once the idea of having any peace in your life. Why, if the world were conducted on that plan, it would be a perfect volcano! Now, I have seen a great deal more of it than you have, and you must allow yourself to be guided by me. Your husband will never tell you

any more about his own affairs than he chooses, you may make up your mind to that; and the less you tell him about yourself the better.'

But Mrs Barrington's worldly wisdom had no effect upon the frank and generous mind of her daughter.

'Mamma,' she said, 'if I marry Sir Gilbert Conroy, or anybody else, you know that I can never love him. I might learn to be grateful for his kindness to me, but my heart is gone. I don't think I've got any heart left. I feel as if the place where it ought to be was empty.'

'That's nonsense, my dear,' said her mother impatiently. 'We are all like that when we're young. We have a first love, and we fancy we can never love again; and after a while we find the difficulty is to keep ourselves from loving too much. And even if it were not the case, it's no good carrying that enthusiastic, gushing sort of feeling into marriage. It

worries a man to death, and wears out his affection sooner than anything else. Never refuse any attention your husband may wish to show you, but keep your own feelings within bounds. That is the secret of a happy marriage, and you will find a man will care all the more for you if there is a little indifference and reserve on your part.'

Fenella sighed. Her idea of a happy marriage had been so very different from that.

'But if it is unnecessary to give love to the man you marry, mamma,' she answered, 'is it not all the more incumbent to be perfectly open with him? And I could not live my life with a secret always weighing at my heart. I should fancy each time he frowned at me that he was going to tell me he had discovered I was false to him.'

'Oh, well, if you are determined to stand in your own light and mine, and take no advice from those who know

better than yourself, there is no more to be said on the subject,' replied Mrs Barrington, with the air of a martyr; 'but I must say that it is hard upon me—bitterly, cruelly hard.'

'Oh, how can I help you?' cried the girl. 'What can I do to remedy the evil I have brought upon us both?'

'The only thing you can do, you refuse to do,' said her mother, reproachfully.

'I cannot do a dishonourable action,' replied Fenella, with dignity.

And after that conclusion they passed several days in a miserable state of coldness and silence towards each other.

Mrs Barrington confided the whole affair to Bennett, and implored her to argue it out with Fenella. For the sympathy she had displayed during her illness had drawn the girl and the old woman very closely together. Indeed, Bennett may be said to have been the only real friend Fenella had; and many

a time since those miserable days had she cried herself to sleep upon the servant's bosom. So it seemed nothing more than natural when Bennett said to her,—

'Why have you made your mamma so angry with you, Miss Fenella? What is it that you don't like in Sir Gilbert Conroy?'

'I like him well enough, Bennett,' said the girl, with a sigh. 'In fact, I see nothing to dislike in him. Only that has nothing to do with marriage, you know; and mamma can't understand that it is impossible for me to forget.'

'But it's your *duty* to forget, my dear,' replied Bennett, who was brushing Fenella's hair at the time. 'Here's Sir Gilbert Conroy, a fine, handsome gentleman, with plenty of money to keep you comfortable and give you everything you want, and dying to make you his lady, and yet you won't listen to a word he says. And all because of a business as

can never come to anything. For, you see, there's where it is, Miss Fenella. If there was any hope or probability like of things turning out as you would wish them, there might be some sense in waiting; but you know as there isn't. And when all's said and done, my dear, the first wasn't a patch upon Sir Gilbert.'

'*Don't*, nurse—*don't*,' murmured Fenella, in a voice of pain, as her hands went up to shade her blinded eyes. Ah! *that First!* Let a dozen come after him —fairer, better, and more true than he —but they will never have the power to drive his image from the heart that sheltered it.

The nurse laid down her brush, and kissed the crown of the fair head that was bowed upon the dressing-table.

'There — there, my lamb,' she said affectionately; 'I wish I had bit out my tongue afore I'd said them words. But it was for the sake of your mamma,

Miss Fenella. She's regular put out, my dear; and no wonder, for she quite counted on your marriage as a means of righting herself, and I'm afraid she'll be in a terrible fix if you continue to set your face against it.'

Fenella looked up suddenly.

'Bennett, tell me the truth,' she said. 'Are we so very poor? is mamma really in want of money?'

'Indeed she is, miss. Don't you remember my telling you at the convent a year ago, that your dear mamma was full of troubles, and it was her debts at that time that worried her so, though, of course, it wasn't fit telling to a child. And they've gone on increasing ever since, till I'm sure I don't know how the mistress will go back to London, unless she finds some way out of 'em first.'

'And I must have been an extra expense to her,' said Fenella, with a sigh.

'Well, miss, you have — there's no denying it! what with your long illness,

and your dresses, and hire of carriages, and all that. But the mistress did it with an object. So she's naturally disappointed at your refusing to marry Sir Gilbert. And to be "my lady" too, miss! I wonder how you can!'

'Mamma has hardly spoken to me for three days,' said Fenella.

'No, my dear! but she will, directly she sees you have changed your mind. She's had a many troubles in this life, poor dear lady! and it seems hard that you should add to 'em—don't it, now?'

'If you will do up my hair, I will go and speak to her about it,' said Fenella wearily; and half-an-hour later she walked into her mother's room.

'Mamma, I have come to tell you that I have made up my mind to accept Sir Gilbert's offer,' she said; 'but it must be on one condition, that you tell him my whole history. Tell it him without reserve, mamma; don't spare me in any way; and if, after hearing it, he should

still wish to make me his wife, I will marry him!'

Mrs Barrington was just about to call her by her favourite name of a fool, and say she might as well have kept her wonderful condescension to herself, when it suddenly struck her that she might find a way by which to keep the game in her own hands. So she smiled sweetly instead, and answered.

'Well, Fenella, if this is the only condition on which you will listen to Sir Gilbert's suit, of course I must comply with it, but I have already told you my opinion of the matter. It is quixotic and unnecessary! and if he *does* propose to you afterwards (which I doubt), you must be doubly grateful to him in return. He has been waiting nearly a week for his answer, and I received a note from him this morning on the subject. I shall therefore write and tell him to call upon me this evening. Madame de Beaupré can chaperon you to the Thellussons. It is

better that you should be out of the way, as the interview is likely to be a painful one.'

'I have been thinking a great deal about it,' replied Fenella, 'and I am sure it is the only right and honourable course to pursue. And if it fails, mamma (as doubtless it will), then you must let me go out as a governess or a companion, and earn my own living. It is unfair that I should be a burden on you any longer, just because I have been so wicked and so weak.'

'A governess!' thought Mrs Barrington as her daughter left the room. 'As if I could allow such a scandal, and with that face too! But if my right hand has not lost its cunning, I will contrive this marriage for her.'

When Sir Gilbert Conroy walked into her little *salon* that evening, he found her looking the very soul of honour and the pink of propriety, arrayed in a grey cashmere dress, with a white lace

fichu that gave her almost the look of a quaker.

'No, no! Sir Gilbert,' she said playfully, as she saw his glance wander round the room, 'you will not find my little girl hidden under any of the sofa or chair covers. Fenella is spending the evening at the Thellussons. I thought it best she should be out of the way whilst you and I discuss this subject together.'

'I am afraid Miss Barrington's absence does not augur a favourable answer to my suit,' replied Sir Gilbert, flushing up to the roots of his fair hair.

'Indeed! you are quite mistaken! My daughter is exceedingly well disposed—shall I say *too* well disposed?—to receive your advances, and thinks highly of the compliment you pay her. But Fenella feels that you are the soul of honour, Sir Gilbert (as she is herself), and, therefore, before granting you an interview, she has set me a little task which she thinks I can execute better than she can.'

'A task!' echoed Sir Gilbert.

'Yes! I am sure you will laugh at us for a couple of silly women, and I told my daughter so; still, I could not blame her decision, as it was founded on the very principles it has been the aim and object of my life to instil into her.'

'You alarm me, Mrs Barrington! Pray don't keep me in suspense,' gasped the baronet.

'Indeed, I will not, for it is not worth while,' laughed the lady pleasantly. 'The fact is, Sir Gilbert, about a year ago my silly child had one of those foolish love affairs which we all know of, and laugh at, —a boy-and-girl flirtation, which never could have come to anything, and which she had almost forgotten, until the agitation caused by your very flattering proposal recalled it to her mind. And then she begged me to tell you of it before you met again. I thought it perfectly unnecessary to worry you about such a trifle, and told her so; but Fenella's soul is of so

pure and lofty a character that I cannot bear to dull even its lightest aspiration. She is so truthful, so honourable, so open, Sir Gilbert. Her mind is like a sheet of crystal.'

'Yes,' stammered the baronet uneasily; 'but — but — about this love affair, Mrs Barrington? Are you quite certain she *has* forgotten all about it, or that it may not crop up to disturb our domestic felicity? Is the gentleman in England still? Is she likely to meet him again?'

Mrs Barrington was annoyed that he took her communication so seriously.

'In England? Oh, dear, no! He went to the colonies, or he's dead—or something. I forget which. But he was such a boy, it's really not worth inquiring. And as for Fenella meeting him again — why, my dear Sir Gilbert, she wouldn't speak to him if she saw him in the streets to-morrow!'

'But these first attachments are sometimes the most enduring, you know, Mrs

Barrington; and if your daughter had quite forgotten all about hers, I hardly think she would have considered it necessary to ask you to break the intelligence to me.'

Then Mrs Barrington could have bitten out her tongue that she had told him anything at all. It would have been just as easy to have assured Fenella that she had. She played with her fan, and looked virtuously reproachful.

'If you take it in that light, Sir Gilbert, I shall be indeed sorry that I spoke. *Need* I have said anything to you on the subject at all? It was only the extreme purity of my child's mind — the truthfulness of her feelings — that made her think of making such a confession! She would not go to you with even the shadow of a secret (however innocent) upon her soul. But it is only a mind of equal candour with her own that could appreciate the delicacy of her motives.'

'But I can — I do!' exclaimed Sir

Gilbert. 'I confess that one of the great attractions that drew me to your daughter, Mrs Barrington, was her youth and apparent innocence. I have grown sick and weary of the women of the world, with their artifice and falsehood and intrigues. I long to have an unsophisticated, guileless maiden for my wife. Indeed, I would put none else in the place once occupied by my honoured mother. I come of an old and unblemished family; and one of our proudest boasts is that no one has ever been able to point the finger of scorn at a Lady Conroy!'

Mrs Barrington went pale with agitation.

'Good heavens! Sir Gilbert, what are you thinking of? Would you link such an expression as that with the silly little flirtation I have just been foolish enough to tell you of?'

'No—certainly not,' he answered; 'and if I cannot secure even your lovely and innocent daughter for my wife without

hearing that she has already been courted by one of my own sex, it is hopeless for me to look farther.'

'Unless you go to the nursery for your Lady Conroy,' laughed Mrs Barrington. 'But, unfortunately, I have no more daughters there, Sir Gilbert, or I should certainly ask you to go and take your choice of them. You are a son-in-law of whom any woman might be proud.'

'You are very good to say so, my dear madam,' replied the baronet. 'Am I to understand, then, that Miss Barrington consents to receive my offer for her hand?'

'The silly creature waits to see if you will renew it after having heard this terrible secret of her former life—that she actually flirted for the space of a few weeks with a lad, who ought to have been whipped by his tutor for his precocity.'

'Miss Barrington might have been sure I should not have permitted such a trifle

to stand in the way of my happiness,' rejoined Sir Gilbert. 'At the same time, as I confess I am rather sensitive on such matters, will you ask her, as a personal favour, not to allude to the subject before me? Perhaps it is as well I should have heard it; but having heard it, I should wish to forget it again. Cannot it be buried in oblivion? I should like to try and fancy (even if it be only a fancy) that my wife never had a lover before myself.'

'And neither has she, my dear Sir Gilbert. You surely would not dignify the wretched boy I spoke of by the name of "lover"? However, I shall repeat your wishes to Fenella, and I am certain they will be attended to. When may I count on the pleasure of seeing you again?'

'With your permission I will call to-morrow afternoon,' he said, as he rose to take his leave. 'I shall not be quite happy until I have learned Miss Barrington's decision from her own lips.'

'Well, of all the glaring pieces of

folly I ever took part in, this is the worst,' thought Mrs Barrington, when the baronet had disappeared. 'Fenella as nearly lost her chance of becoming Lady Conroy as possible, and entirely through her own fault. The idea of rousing a man's suspicions unnecessarily! I wish I had followed my own judgment and told him nothing. However, the girl is so strange, she might allude in some way to the matter, so it is as well, perhaps, that he should be prepared. But it must go no farther. I must impress on Fenella the absolute necessity of holding her tongue henceforward.'

As soon as she returned home from the Thellussons, Fenella ran up to her mother's room, eager to learn her fate.

'Well, mamma!' she exclaimed breathlessly, as she entered it, 'has he been?'

'Yes, certainly; Sir Gilbert is too much of a gentleman not to keep his appointments.'

'And you told him?'

'I did!'

'*Everything?*'

'Everything!'

The girl leaned back against the wall, almost speechless from excitement.

'Oh!' she gasped. 'What *did* he say?'

'He said all that was most kind and courteous. His affection for you is great enough to surmount any obstacle. He renews his offer of marriage to you.'

The faint colour died out of Fenella's cheeks. It was evident which way her hopes had lain. But surprise was her predominant feeling at the news.

'You told Sir Gilbert *everything*, and yet he said that?' she asked incredulously.

'Haven't I answered the question already! Do you doubt my word?' returned Mrs Barrington, in a sharp voice.

'Oh no, mamma; but it seems so won-

derful to me! I thought when he heard it he would just walk out of the house and never come back again. What did you tell him? Does he know that I cannot pretend to love him; that—that—I cannot forget what is past, whatever pleasures the future may hold for me? I will be a good wife to him, mamma (as far as I can), and I shall always feel grateful for his forbearance in this matter; but I *hope* you told him that he must not expect any more?'

'If you will sit down and talk like a reasonable creature, instead of a woman out of a play, I will repeat exactly what passed between us,' replied Mrs Barrington.

She saw that it would be useless to try half measures with Fenella; that if her conscience were not entirely satisfied, she would probably speak to Sir Gilbert herself on the subject; and that, whilst she was about it, she might as well tell a good lie as a feeble one.

The girl sat down, but impatiently, with large wondering eyes of expectation still turned upon her mother.

'I told Sir Gilbert Conroy *everything*, from the beginning to the end,' commenced Mrs Barrington emphatically, whilst her daughter's face grew scarlet. 'Of course he was very much distressed at hearing it (who wouldn't be?); I am not sure that he didn't shed tears, but men are sensitive about such things, and he turned his head the other way.'

'How *good* of him,' murmured Fenella.

'He felt it *deeply*, there is no doubt—and so did I. It was anything but a pleasant task you set me, Fenella; but when his emotion had subsided, he told me it could make no difference in his affection for you; on the contrary (if anything), he loved you more for what you had suffered, and he repeated his offer to make you his wife.'

'He must be a very generous man,' said her daughter meditatively.

'He is more than generous,' replied Mrs Barrington; 'he is noble, chivalrous, heroic! But he coupled his decision with a request which I was obliged to accord him in your name, Fenella, and which you must be good enough to pay particular attention to.'

'What is it, mamma?' said the girl dreamily.

'Sir Gilbert said to me, "I am willing to overlook and forget all that is past, Mrs Barrington, on one condition, and that is, that a total silence is preserved on the subject henceforward. I love your daughter dearly, and am most desirous of making her Lady Conroy; but I am a proud man, and do not care to think that any one ever courted my wife before myself. I should wish to fancy (even if it be only fancy) that I am her first lover."'

'He can never be my *lover*,' cried Fenella quickly.

'Oh, don't be so tiresome,' said her

mother, 'catching one up in that rude way. It is not at all likely he *will* be your lover — husbands never are — but the thing is, that you are not to speak of, nor allude to the other; nor to anything, in fact, that happened before your marriage.'

'Am I likely to do so?' sighed Fenella, with her hand pressed upon her aching heart.

'Well, that's the condition, my dear, and I hope you understand it. Sir Gilbert is coming here to-morrow afternoon to receive his answer from your own lips. Just give it simply and say no more about it. Let the past be buried in oblivion, as he wishes it to be, and depend upon it you will be as happy a woman as the world contains. It is an excellent marriage, and I must say, after your *escapade* of last year, that you are a very lucky girl to secure it, and it is much more than you deserve.'

'I know that,' said Fenella, 'and I shall always be very grateful to Sir Gilbert for his kindness to me; but as for being *happy*, mother, that is impossible.'

'Stuff and nonsense, child! Don't begin to *pose* for a martyr, and fancy you are being dragged into a marriage against your will, like the heroine of a novel.'

'Oh no! I should never be so silly as that, because I really wish to be married. I am sure I shall be happier with Sir Gilbert than I am at home,' replied the girl ingenuously.

'Well, I must say that's grateful of you; and after all the trouble you've given me!' cried Mrs Barrington.

'Yes, I suppose I must have been the cause of a great deal of trouble and disappointment to you, mamma, and I am sorry for it; but still, you know, we have not been very happy together, and if Sir Gilbert really loves me, I am sure I shall grow fond of him. My heart does *ache*

so for love sometimes,' cried Fenella, in a voice of pain.

Mrs Barrington thought it just as well to keep down her rising wrath, and be polite to the future Lady Conroy.

'Well, my sweet girl, I acknowledge we might have spent a pleasanter year than the last; but there have been *causes*, you know, Fenella, and my maternal pride has been sorely wounded. But it will be better now, dearest, will it not? Bennett and I will do our utmost to get together a decent trousseau for you, and once launched on the world as Lady Conroy, you will never remember your former life except as an ugly dream.'

'Will he want it to be *soon?*' faltered Fenella.

'I should think so, my dear. Sir Gilbert is not a boy, you see, and there is no reason for delay. I shall see you presented at Court before you are eighteen.'

'Yes, I was only seventeen last birthday,' said Fenella, with a piteous smile,

as the mention seemed to recall how much she had passed through before that time.

'Most people would take you for older,' remarked Mrs Barrington. 'Sir Gilbert thought you were nineteen or twenty.'

'The last year has made a woman of me; I shall never be a girl again,' said her daughter, as she gathered up her evening wraps and retired to bed.

But the night did not bring much rest to her. Emphatically as Mrs Barrington had asserted that Sir Gilbert Conroy had been made acquainted with all the facts of her former life, Fenella was not satisfied. She had learnt to distrust her mother's statements—to discredit her pretty oaths and smiles, as she did her blooming cheeks and perfumed skin—and she lay awake, wondering how she could arrive at the truth for herself. She did not feel any particular agitation at the idea of seeing Sir Gilbert Conroy and telling him that she would be his wife.

Her heart was empty and sodden, and she thought she would just as soon marry him as remain single: it was all the same to her; she could never feel very happy or very miserable again, and she believed that her future life would be more bearable passed with Sir Gilbert than with her mother. So that when the baronet entered her presence the following afternoon, he could detect nothing different from her usual appearance, except a questioning look in her eye, as if she longed to find out exactly what he thought of her. But she coloured when he approached her side, and he interpreted the action according to his own wishes.

'Miss Barrington,' he commenced, as he took her hand, 'your mother has, of course, prepared you for this interview. Am I right in conjecturing that you would not have granted it unless you intended to give me a favourable answer?'

'Yes,' she said quietly, 'mamma has

told me all about it, and—I thank you, Sir Gilbert.'

'Does that mean that you will be my wife, Fenella?'

'Since you wish it to be so—yes.'

At this answer Sir Gilbert naturally professed to be enraptured. He kissed the hand he held, and, not being rebuked for forwardness, kissed the fair face that glowed above it, and then he put his arm round her waist, and drew Fenella to a sofa, and sat down beside her, and talked of his mansion in town and his castle in Scotland—of the family jewels which had not been worn since the death of his mother, Lady Valeria Conroy, and how she had been the daughter of the Duke of Ben Nevis, whose kinsman, David of Ben Nevis, had fought side by side on the field of Bosworth with his own great ancestor, Gilbert de Conn, one of the 'roys' or 'kings' of Scotland. For Sir Gilbert's favourite hobby was the age and stainlessness of his family tree, and

he looked down with the supremest contempt on all the unfortunate ones of the earth who could not produce a parchment roll inscribed with their pedigree.

Fenella's parents were not noble, but he had taken good care to ascertain before proposing to her that the family on both sides was irreproachable. He would not have transformed Venus Aphrodite herself into Lady Conroy unless she had been able to prove that she had respectable ancestors. But even the enumeration and description of the late Lady Valeria's diamonds and emeralds did not seem to awaken much interest in the bosom of the girl, who kept her clear, grey eyes fixed upon Sir Gilbert with the same questioning look in them with which she had welcomed him.

'But,' she said presently, interrupting him in the midst of a description of the gardens at Conroy Castle, 'are you *quite* sure that I shall be able to please you in all things? I am not a very loving girl,

you know (mamma will have told you that), and perhaps you might expect more from me than I shall feel myself able to perform.'

'I shall always do my utmost to meet your wishes, Fenella, and I hope you will be as ready to meet mine. I expect no more from you than that. Is it too much?'

'Oh no! How could I give you less?' she murmured. 'It is very, *very* good of you to accept so little,' and then, with a sudden impulse, she laid her hand upon his arm. 'Sir Gilbert, mamma said I was not to mention the subject, but I must—only this once. She told you last night everything — about — about — last year, and still you come and ask me to be your wife! How can I ever be grateful enough to you for your forbearance to me?'

He almost laughed at the varying colour which came and went in her cheeks, and made her look so earnest and so beautiful as she said the words.

'My dearest girl,' he answered, as he drew her closer to himself, 'I had already forgotten all about it. I am a man of the world, you see, Fenella, and used to hear all sorts of things; and although I confess that, just at first, I was a little disappointed, the unworthy feeling soon wore off again, and I am perfectly contented to take you *as you are!* Only—will you grant me one favour?—not to make the past a subject of constant allusion! Let it die out, my dear Fenella, and forget it yourself, as I have.'

'I will try,' she replied, in a low voice; and Sir Gilbert recommenced his description of the glories upon which she was about to enter, whilst she mused to herself in silence, and thought what a generous, noble heart he must have, and how good and grateful she should be in return.

Before he left in the evening, the weding was fixed for that day month. The baronet's only near relation was a married

sister, who would be charmed to find an excuse to visit Paris, and so he thought the marriage had better take place at the English Embassy, with as little fuss as needful.

'Too soon! too soon! too terribly soon!' cried Mrs Barrington playfully. 'Why, my poor child will only be seventeen years and three months old! She oughtn't to *think* of marriage even for the next five years — ought you, Fenella, darling? However, I suppose you wilful lovers will have your own way!'

But a look from her daughter's eyes stopped Mrs Barrington's banter. She was still very much afraid of Fenella, and would feel relieved when those honest, serious eyes of hers were well out of the way.'

'Will the time we have fixed upon be agreeable to you?' said Sir Gilbert, turning to Fenella.

The girl started and flushed.

'Oh yes; it is all the same to me! That is—I mean—I would rather please

you than myself. It is the least I can do in return for all your goodness to me.'

That was the keynote of her life thenceforward, and her belief in it made her marriage seem almost a gladsome thing. She grew more and more contented with her prospects as the days went on. She felt that, by God's mercy, she was going to lead an honourable and useful life for the future, and she tried to persuade herself that she was happy.

But there were times—sad times alone and in the dark—when the picture was reversed, and the past came back so vividly upon her memory that she was ready to leap out of bed, and write to Sir Gilbert and say she had been mad, and that never —never—never could she be his wife—nor the wife of any man. Times—when the passionate looks and tones of Geoffrey Doyne, as she remembered them upon the sands of Ines-cedwyn, would return to torture her with their dead sweetness—

when she fancied she could hear his voice, and see his eyes, and feel the very clasp of his arms about her beating heart. And the present and the future would become a black and mighty void, and she stood face to face with the living, unforgotten past. But Fenella had strength at least to battle with such memories, and call herself hard names for weeping over them. She would resolutely stamp upon the vision; she would pray until she had drowned the voice; she would tell herself that she was worse than a fool even to bestow another thought upon the man who had been so base as to betray her. He was a traitor, she would say to herself, with the tears streaming down her face—a traitor and a liar! He *must* be, else why did he swear to keep to her alone when he knew he was going to marry another woman? Why did he accept her vows of fidelity when he was about to break his own? She would be brave—she would be strong—she would

tear his very image from her heart; she would not shelter there one who could be so cowardly and so untrue to her and to himself.

Ah, how many women have said the same before! How many tortured wretches have cried to God to take away the memory that rose before them like a mocking devil, gibing at their despair! And with all their resolutions, their oaths, and their prayers, how hard it is—how bitterly hard—to erase a true love (however unworthy) from the heart! The man who is bound by swathes too powerful for him to rend asunder, may be strong, and courageous, and determined. He may fight like a lion for his release, he may strain every nerve and muscle to get free; but if the bonds are beyond his physical capability to rupture, he will only injure himself, and sink back again, exhausted by his efforts. It were wiser for him to accept the inevitable, and get up and walk through the world with as

much ease as his crippled condition will allow him.

So Fenella waked up at the appointed time, to find that she was the wife of Sir Gilbert Conroy; waited on with all attention and kindness by her husband, and surrounded by every luxury that money could procure for her.

Yet the swathes were around her still, and she would lie bound with them in her coffin.

CHAPTER VI.

SMOOTH WATERS.

'It is vain that we would coldly gaze
On such as smile upon us: the heart must
Leap kindly back to kindness.'—*Byron.*

WHETHER from intuition, or the common-sense that characterised most of his actions, Sir Gilbert Conroy went just the right way to win such kindly feeling as it was in the power of his young wife to bestow upon him. He treated her as a friend. He did not (after the usual manner of bridegrooms) load her with caresses and compliments until she was sick of flattery. Neither did he sit gazing at her hour after hour, as if he could not satisfy himself with

the contemplation of her beauty. Had he done so, Fenella would probably have become shy and distant with him, or openly expressed her dislike to his behaviour, and then quarrels would have ensued between them. But there was nothing in Sir Gilbert's attentions from which the most delicate nature could have revolted; he was chivalry itself. He waited on his wife in public with the greatest assiduity, anticipating every wish, and never permitting her to do a single thing for herself. Still, he would have done as much for any lady confided to his charge.

Even in private, although he was always polite and affectionate in his manner towards her, he was never exacting. He allowed her to follow her inclinations in the matter of their intercourse, rather than to press his own upon her. So that after a few days Fenella lost her shyness, and became quite friendly and intimate with her husband, and after a few weeks she

would have missed him very much had he been called away from her.

The fact is, Sir Gilbert Conroy was not in love with Fenella, and never had been. Her chief attraction in his eyes (as he had told her mother) was her youth and innocence. He was weary of the fickleness and falsehood of fashionable women (as, indeed, he had just cause to be), and he believed that Fenella would make a Lady Conroy of whom he need never be ashamed. Of course he admired her. He was not quite such a stoic at five-and-thirty as to have lost all faith in female beauty, but he had seen handsomer women—as he coolly informed his sister, Lady Marjoram, on the day of the wedding. And Lady Marjoram, who was one of the most charming women who ever spent her life in a round of frivolity, had shaken her head at him and said,—

'You're as bad as ever, Bertie. I believe you'd pick holes in the Venus de

Milo if she could find those lost arms of hers and wind them round you. But mark my words—Fenella may not be as beautiful as some of your former loves, but she is a better woman than the whole lot of them put together. She's the first girl that has ever taken your fancy who is fit to fill our mother's place.'

'I believe you there,' replied Sir Gilbert.

'And I hope you'll be a good boy to her, Bertie, and put the thought of that horrid Mrs Messiter out of your head altogether,' continued his sister more seriously.

'You may be sure of that, Janie,' was his quick reply. 'That portion of my life is over for ever.'

And Sir Gilbert was right. That portion of his life during which he had been held in thrall by an unprincipled woman, who cared for nothing but using his purse and gratifying her own vanity, was over for ever. It had extended over many

years, and been the cause of much anxiety to his family, who feared it might stand in the way of his settlement; but it was done with, and it would never be renewed.

Sir Gilbert was too honourable a man to deceive the girl whom he had made his wife. He would exact the utmost propriety of conduct from Lady Conroy, and he would render her the same in return. But an old attachment is not to be forgotten in a day, and the remembrance of Mrs Messiter tended to make the baronet more deferential in his manners towards Fenella than he would otherwise have been. And she was so glad of it. She was so thankful that he did not call her 'darling,' and make her sit upon his lap, and try and force confessions of love from her, which she would have been unable to refuse to make without offending him. It was so much nicer as it was (she said to herself); and she actually began to feel a sort of affection for Sir Gilbert, because he

did not exhibit it too freely towards her. The life they led together was like a dream of fairyland to the girl, who had left a convent school only to see Ines-cedwyn and Sainte Pauvrette.

Sir Gilbert took her for a month to Italy, previous to their returning to London for the season; and as the days went on, Fenella began to ask herself if she were asleep or awake, everything was so new and wonderful to her; she had not believed that living could be made so easy. If she wished to dress for the evening or for walking, her robes were laid in readiness for her, and her new maid was in obsequious attendance, ready to put them on; if she rose to leave the room or the house, a man-servant sprang up to open the door, to carry her shawl, or to receive the orders she might wish to leave behind her. She was never permitted to walk, especially through the streets; a carriage was always at her beck and call; and her purse was liberally supplied with money to make any

purchase she might feel inclined for. Her husband considered that it was his duty to see that Fenella preserved a certain amount of state—not for her own sake, but for that of Lady Conroy—and he would have done the same for the honour of the name she bore, had his wife been the ugliest old woman in Christendom. But the girl did not consider this. Her path was strewn with roses for her ; her husband was always kind and courteous ; and her heart was a grateful one, and responded accordingly. Even when they returned to their town house in Portman Square, the pleasure continued. The first coming back to London was painful to her—she could not deny that—but she shook the feeling off bravely, and her new sister-in-law soon made her feel at home.

It has already been said that Lady Marjoram was a very sweet woman. She was, moreover, a very grand lady (as titles go), and her family were proud of the connection, but no accession to rank and fortune

had been able to spoil her unaffected womanly nature.

Her husband was Henry Frederick Charles Albert Ernest, fifth Earl of Marjoram and tenth Baron Carberry, with an annual rent-roll of twenty thousand, and estates in all the countries of the United Kingdom. He was a fat, good-tempered, farmerlike-looking person of middle age, who allowed his countess to have her own way in everything, and expected to enjoy the same privileges himself.

This very grand sister-in-law might, under ordinary circumstances, have turned up her nose at her brother's choice, and would, under *most* circumstances (for some of the worst-bred women in the world are to be found sheltering their vulgarity beneath the strawberry leaves), have mixed up so much condescension in her intercourse with the young and portionless girl as to turn her politeness into an insult. But Lady Marjoram was a gentle-

woman, and that is a rank which, if we do not inherit it from the goodness of our own hearts, no strawberry leaves can give us. She had been working 'like a nigger' (as she herself expressed it) to get the Portman Square house into proper order for the Conroys' first season in town; and as soon as Fenella was ensconced in it, Lady Marjoram flew to her side, and offered her every assistance in her power.

'Of course you must be presented at Court, dear,' she said,—'that must be the first thing; and then you must give dinners and receptions, and all kinds of horrors! Oh, how I hated them when I married Marjoram; but they must be done, you know. And if you wish it, I'll come and help you through with everything that your cook and housekeeper can't do for you.'

The kind tone and feeling of her sister-in-law moved Fenella deeply. She pressed closer to Lady Majoram and thanked her, with the tears in her eyes.

'Why, my dear child, what is this?' cried the Countess; 'you didn't suppose I was going to leave you to do it all by yourself, did you? I am not quite such a wretch as that comes to. I remember too well what I suffered when I married Marjoram, and the old Countess-Dowager wouldn't give me a single hint, and only found fault with everything I did. But is the house as you like it, Fenella? Can you suggest any alteration?'

'Nothing, dear Lady Marjoram; it is just perfect, I assure you.'

'You mustn't call me Lady Marjoram. I must be Janie to you, Fenella. Don't forget that we are sisters, though I suppose I am nearly old enough to be your mother. What is your age, dear?'

'I was seventeen last January,' replied Fenella, with a little sigh.

'And how do you and my brother get on together? Does he treat you kindly? Are you quite happy with him?'

Fenella opened her eyes.

'Oh, Janie! what a question. Of course he is kind to me—very, very kind.'

'No "*of course*" in the matter, my dear. The generality of men are brutes, and marriage (as a rule) is a mistake. Not but what my Marjoram is an awfully good old fellow; I wouldn't change him for the world. And my brother is a gentleman, too, which is, after all, the main thing. A woman can generally get on with a gentleman, whether she loves him or not; but so very few men *are* gentlemen to their wives! It's a lost art, Fenella. The man who would fell another to the ground for daring to say he was *not* a gentleman, will behave in the rudest manner to the unfortunate woman who is compelled to listen to whatever he may choose to say to her.'

'I am not an unfortunate woman,' laughed Fenella softly; 'Gilbert has never said a rude word to me.'

'I'm very glad to hear it, my dear; and I think I know my brother well

enough to say that he never will. You will find Gilbert very particular—in fact, he's a bit of a prude; but so long as you remain what you are now — innocent, modest, and refined in your speech and manners—he will make you the best of husbands. Gilbert couldn't stand a woman that was talked of. He is very fond of you and very proud of you, and so he ought to be; but he is fonder and prouder of his family name (that has been his weakness from a boy), and I believe he would kill the woman he loved, with his own hand, sooner than she should disgrace it.'

'I will never disgrace it,' said Fenella, in a low voice.

'I am sure you won't,' rejoined Lady Marjoram heartily, as she took the girl in her arms and affectionately embraced her.

Under the tuition and guidance of her sister-in-law, all those ordeals which appear so terrible to a young wife, first

launched upon the fashionable world, were transformed into pleasures; and Fenella had been presented at Court, and attended her first ball, and given her first dinner-party before she had time to wonder whether she should be a success or a failure.

The upshot was that she proved an undoubted success. Introduced everywhere by the Countess of Marjoram, the youthful Lady Conroy became an object of universal attention and admiration. The extreme delicacy of her skin, the clearness of her complexion, and the child-like hue of her soft fair hair, all combined to make Fenella look even younger than she was; and as it was one of Sir Gilbert's fancies that she should always appear dressed in white, she soon gained the name of 'The Lily' in the circles she frequented. The baronet mentioned this fact to his sister, with pride beaming in his eyes.

'I don't approve,' he said, 'of the

modern custom of giving nicknames to ladies of rank; but since the licence has unfortunately been allowed to creep into society, they could not have chosen one for Lady Conroy that would have offended me less.'

'That would have pleased you more, you mean,' cried Lady Marjoram, laughing. 'Take care, Sir Gilbert de Conn—Roy of Scotland! If you don't mind your P's and Q's, you'll be guilty of the plebeian crime of falling in love with your own wife.'

The baronet took her jest quite seriously.

'No, Janie; I assure you I feel nothing of that kind for Fenella, and neither does she for me. We are the best of friends, and nothing more. That is as it should be. Any warmer feeling than friendship is sure to suffer from so close a contact. By the way, she asked me yesterday if she might take singing lessons. What shall I do about it?'

'Get her the very best master you can,' replied his sister decidedly. 'Let her have Signor Possetrina. She has a lovely voice, and is fond of music. Besides, she is the very best little girl in the world, and you must give her every mortal thing she has a fancy for.'

'You are quite right,' said Sir Gilbert, 'and I will engage Signor Possetrina for her at once.'

These singing lessons soon became Fenella's greatest pleasure, and, under the tuition of the best master in town, she made rapid progress. Signor Possetrina was charmed both with her voice and her ability. He found her well grounded in the art, and he was never tired of praising the purity of her tones, the delicacy of her ear, and the earnestness with which she pursued her studies. She would have given up her engagements for her music, if Sir Gilbert would have permitted such a sacrifice

to art. But every spare hour she spent at her piano, and her singing soon began to be talked of as much as her face had been.

'Almost too much talked of,' as Sir Gilbert remarked, with a shrug of his shoulders, to Lady Marjoram. 'I hope she's not going to turn out a genius, Janie. Geniuses are generally erratic sort of persons, with wills of their own, and I shouldn't care for Lady Conroy to become too decided and clever.'

'Bertie, you're a fool,' rejoined his sister (it is only sisters that can call men 'fools' with impunity; they won't stand it from their wives); 'wouldn't you rather your children had a clever mother than a stupid one? Besides, do you imagine women are any the less obstinate or deceitful for being boobies? Not a bit of it! It's the wives that have no intellectual qualities wherewith to amuse themselves, that try and get

their amusement out of flirting, and sometimes even out of champagne.'

'*Don't*, Janie,' said Sir Gilbert, with a shudder.

'Well, then, my dear boy, be sensible, and let Fenella sing all day, and all night too, if she wishes it, so long as she is contented with no more dangerous audience than old Signor Possetrina and yourself.'

So Fenella was allowed to follow her talent to her heart's content, and it did content her wonderfully. Her music sang to her—sadly enough, and yet sweetly—of her unforgotten past. Geoffrey's tones (although unconsciously to herself) were wafted back from the shores of memory, upon the wings of song; and whilst Fenella sat at the piano, she would wander off into the realms of fancy, picturing a future perhaps in which all the crooked paths of this world would be made straight, and all the rough places plain, and lose herself in impos-

sible dreams, until she was recalled to earth again, and found her cheeks were wet with tears.

Yet she was happy; as happy as any one can be who has outlived the thoughtlessness of childhood—because it is impossible to grow up and think, without weeping for ourselves or others. There were times, indeed, when a chance word or look—a chord of music, or the scent of a flower—would bring back the remembrance of Geoffrey Doyne so powerfully on Fenella's mind, as to make her sick with longing to see his face once more (if only for a moment). But it was the sort of feeling with which we regard the dead—those hallowed dead whose still, white features we sometimes feel as if we would give our lives to look on once again. It had no more hope, and no more real desire of being realised, than we have of unsoldering the coffins that have been closed so long.

There was one trait in Fenella's char-

acter which somewhat puzzled Lady Marjoram; she seemed to think so tenderly of little children, and yet to be almost ashamed if detected in any kindness towards them. The Countess had a nursery full of little ones, from big boys and girls of twelve and fourteen, to a tiny stranger who had only made his appearance in this wicked world about three months previously. Lady Marjoram thought very little of babies; they were amongst the natural nuisances of this life, she said, that must be endured. She romped with all her children alike, from the eldest to the youngest, and was quite offended if one of them dared to be weakly or sick. It was unlike either herself or Marjoram, she would declare; and if the brat didn't get well soon, she should begin to think that he had been changed at nurse.

'Take the boy! he won't break,' she exclaimed one day, as she threw her infant into Fenella's arms.

Something—what was it?—swelled in the girl's breast as she received the little creature, and the tears rushed suddenly to her eyes.

'Please take him back again,' she faltered to her sister-in-law; 'I—I—am not much used to babies.'

'You mean you don't like them, my dear. Well, I don't wonder at it. Nobody does until they have them of their own. But you must get your hand in, you know, Lady Conroy. Bertie won't be satisfied till he has a son.'

'No, I suppose not,' replied Fenella, 'and some day I hope he may have one.'

'How quietly you said that, child! too quietly a great deal for your age. One would think you had had a dozen.'

Fenella coloured.

'I *am* older than my age, Janie,' she said, with a sigh; 'but I was not always so happy as I am now.'

'I expect not,' thought Lady Marjoram; and then she asked, as a natural sequence,

'Have you heard lately of Mrs Barrington, Fenella?'

'I have not, and I feel rather anxious about it. She was to have been in town last month, and then she caught this attack of low fever, and Bennett seems to think it may be some time yet before she is able to move. I am sure she must be very weak, or she never would have missed coming to town for the season.'

'Well, the season may be said to be over now, so I suppose Mrs Barrington will not join you until you go to Conroy Castle.'

'I do not see how it will be possible, Janie. Gilbert told me yesterday that we must be there by the twelfth.'

'Of course, for the grouse! Bertie would not miss the first day of the season for anything. Sport is his great pastime, Fenella; he loves it as enthusiastically as you do, music. You must never throw any obstacle in the way of his pursuing it.'

'Why should I?' asked Fenella simply.

She was quite at her ease in the presence of her husband, but she was equally happy when he was absent. Her present content did not arise from being married to him (though she may have deceived herself into thinking so); it was due rather to the fact that he never urged the circumstance of their marriage too strongly on her notice. Her relations with her mother had caused Fenella some uneasiness since she had become Lady Conroy. Mrs Barrington had appeared to imagine that she ought to derive as many advantages from the marriage as her daughter, and Sir Gilbert had not seen the matter in the same light. Indeed, the greatest drawback in his eyes to marrying Fenella had been the existence of her mother. He despised the widow's character from every point of view—he would have removed his wife entirely from her influence had he been able, and the last thing he desired was that she should continue to

exert it. Fenella had, therefore, been placed in a very difficult position,—forced to read and answer Mrs Barrington's letters of reproach, and complaints of poverty, on the one hand, and to bear with equanimity Sir Gilbert's animadversions on her mother's conduct, on the other.

At last the difference of opinion had been settled by the baronet giving his wife permission to invite Mrs Barrington to stay with them for a month, either in London or Scotland, but this invitation (as has already been shown) she was unable through illness to accept. Fenella could not feel quite sorry about it,—not so sorry as, she told herself, she ought to feel—because she had a premonition that Mrs Barrington's advent would not be productive of increased happiness in her married life. She would rather be with Gilbert alone, she thought. Her mother's presence could only remind her of the darkest passages in her young life.

And she was spared the ordeal she had begun to dread; for she and her husband had only been settled in Scotland for a fortnight, when the news reached them from Paris that Mrs Barrington had succumbed to the weakness supervening her attack of fever.

CHAPTER VII.

A REVELATION.

'Thy words have darted hope into my soul,
And comfort dawns upon me.'—*Southern.*

IT was naturally a great shock to Fenella's nervous system to hear of her mother's death. It is a shock to learn (thus unexpectedly) of the death of any one whom we have lately seen in apparent health and strength. And it seemed so impossible to picture Mrs Barrington dead, and laid out in her coffin. Mrs Barrington, with her painted cheeks and skin, her dyed hair, her toilettes of pink and blue and silver, her artificial ways and words and looks.

Fenella could not realise her mother shorn of these frivolous accompaniments; she wondered how she would get on without them, even in the other world. But when the first shock was over, the girl's honest heart could not pretend there was much grief remaining for their present separation. There might have been. Mrs Barrington, in repulsing her daughter's affection, had thrust from her a rich store of love that might have been her consolation and her stay till her life's end. But love is a plant of growth; it can no more live without nourishment than a flower can flourish without earth and water. And Mrs Barrington had killed the beautiful blossom that was springing up in her child's heart. She had trampled it under foot and neglected it, and it had perished for lack of food. And now that she had passed out of sight, she had not left one loving memory in Fenella's mind by which to mourn her. On the contrary, her daughter, in deference to the

fact that she had been her father's wife, and she was dead, felt herself compelled, resolutely, to put away all thoughts of her, since remembrance brought reproach in its train.

But she could not help thinking of Bennett—dear good old Bennett, who had been with them before her own birth, and who had been so attached to her late mistress; she was terribly anxious to know what was to become of Bennett. The servant was no longer young—she was at least fifty years of age, twenty of which had been spent in their service; and she had become so wedded to their ways, it was unlikely she would find another place to suit her. Fenella wanted to send for her at once to Conroy Castle. There was a baby expected there in the spring, and her wish was to instal Eliza Bennett as head of the nursery.

'She loves me,' she said to her husband, with big pathetic eyes, 'and she will take every care of our little child for my sake.'

Sir Gilbert was good-naturedly disposed to acquiesce in anything his wife might desire. He was going over to Paris to attend the funeral of his mother-in-law, and, had the truth been known, in a more contented frame of mind than he would have cared to exhibit openly. Mrs Barrington had been his *bête noire*, but she was (fortunately) removed to a better sphere; it was quite immaterial to him what became of the servant.

'Do just as you like about it, my dear,' he replied. 'I have no doubt the old woman will be quite as efficient a guardian for the heir-apparent as anyone else.'

'Oh, Gilbert, you are so very good to me!' murmured Fenella gratefully. 'Then I will write Bennett a letter, dear, and you shall deliver it to her yourself.'

In consequence of which, Bennett, having first paid a short visit to her brother in Ines-cedwyn, arrived at Conroy Castle robed in the deepest mourning, and clasped

her young mistress in her arms again. Had it been a meeting between a mother and child it could hardly have been more affectionate. The servant forgot all the grandeur attendant on Sir Gilbert and Lady Conroy, as she showered kiss after kiss on Fenella's face; and the girl herself was scarcely less delighted to lay her head on that kind, homely breast once more.

There was a link between Bennett and herself which nothing on this earth could have the power to rupture. The servant was, of course, full of the account of Mrs Barrington's illness and death, and for awhile neither of them could speak of anything else.

'And to think, dear Miss Fenella,' cried Bennett, who could not get out of the habit of using the old name, 'that you shouldn't have been with us at the time! But it was so sudden, my dear; the doctor was as surprised as any of us—for we had thought she was doing so nicely, poor dear

lady, and would be able to be moved at the farthest in a week or two. But she sank (as you may say) in a few hours—nothing would save her; and her teeth was so fixed we couldn't even get a drop of brandy and water down her throat.'

'Did she speak of me, Bennett? Did she send me any message?' demanded Fenella timidly.

'Oh, she spoke often of you when she was in the fever, my dear; and she used to talk of Conroy Castle, and the time when she'd get here, and what a fine place it was, and all that. Poor dear! little she thought she'd never see it. And as for me, Miss Fenella, it seems as if my hands was empty, now she's gone. She was just like a child to me—so sweet and amiable—always wanting this or that. It was "Bennett, come here!" or "Bennett, go there!" all day long. She didn't seem to be able to do anything without her poor Bennett—did she, now?'

'No; I am sure she looked on you as

her very best friend, Bennett, and I shall do the same for her sake. But when she was dying—when the end came—couldn't poor mamma speak then? Didn't she say one word of me, or send me any message?'

'Well, miss, you see, I don't think your poor dear mamma knew as her death was so near at hand, for she only seemed a little more fractious-like to me. I had just handed her some *limonade*, and I suppose she wanted *tisane*, bless her! for she pushed it aside and spilt it all over the counterpane, and said, "Take it away." And them was her last words, Miss Fenella; for as I was setting the bed to rights, I see a change come over her face, and I caught her up in my arms, and she was gone. I couldn't believe it. You might have knocked me over with a feather.' And Bennett buried her face in her rough hands, and cried like a little child. 'She was my life, Miss Fenella—just my life and nothing else,' she sobbed. 'It seemed as if I hadn't a will of my own when she was

near—as if I couldn't move hand nor foot unless she ordered me. You know how I used to wait on her from morning till night. And now the world seems empty. I shall never have any rest for thinking of her. I wouldn't mind twice the trouble if I could only have her back again.'

Fenella tried to comfort the good-hearted creature with some of those ordinary arguments which sound like empty wind to ears on which a beloved voice has ceased to fall.

'You mustn't fret, dear Bennett. You must try and think how much better it is for her to be free of all the trouble of this world. I don't think poor mamma can have been very happy here. She always seemed full of worry and anxiety; and now—now we must hope that it is all over, and—and—that she is in heaven,' said Fenella hesitatingly.

'In *heaven!* my dear lady!' replied Bennett, wiping her eyes. 'Yes, I'm sure of *that!* I know for certain as my

darling mistress is walking in her robes of glory, with her 'arp in her 'and—and not a more beautiful angel in the whole place. Oh, yes! *she's* happy now, if *any one* is, miss. It isn't her (sweet angel!) as I'm thinking of—it's myself, and you, poor lamb! it's what *we* shall do without her.'

'We must try and comfort each other,' said Fenella gently. 'And now tell me of your brother, dear Bennett, and of Martha. Were you glad to see them again, and are they well and happy?'

Eliza Bennett coloured and looked ill at ease.

'Oh, yes! Miss Fenella—that is, my lady—Ben and Martha was looking well enough, and of course they was glad to see me, notwithstandin' the sad event as took me there.' And then she continued rather irrelevantly, 'I always carried out all your poor dear mamma's wishes to the very letter, Miss Fenella; there was never nothing she told me to do but what I thought it right to obey her; and I hope

it *has* been right, or if not, that the Almighty won't lay it to my charge. But I made a sort of idol of her, Miss Fenella; and I know that's wrong, and sometimes we're punished for doing of it—still, when she *was* my mistress, I considered myself bound to serve her, even to the uttermost farthing.'

Fenella stared at this address — it seemed so uncalled for; but she answered warmly,—

'I am sure God, who looks on our hearts, dear Bennett, will never blame you for doing *more* than your duty. The majority of us do so much less. But I should like to hear something about your own affairs. Did poor mamma pay you your wages? I know they had been due for a long time; and has she left any debts in Paris?'

Bennett looked round cautiously, and lowered her voice.

'Well, my dear, to my thinking, your good gentleman must have cleared 'em off.

I know there *was* some, but after the funeral he called me into the *salon*, and paid me my wages, and something very handsome over, and told me I was to pack up my dear mistress's bits of jewellery for you, and to consider her wardrobe as my own, which I thought was most generous of him. And then I ventured to ask him about the bills, and Sir Gilbert said I wasn't to worry my head on the matter, as he would see to 'em himself.'

'Dear Gilbert!' said Fenella. 'Oh! he is so good and so generous to me, nurse. I don't know what I have done to deserve so kind a husband.'

'And such a fine-looking gentleman, too, Miss Fenella; and such a princely home! It does my heart good to see you so comfortable and so happy. Ah! if my poor dear mistress had only lived to enjoy it with us!'

'Yes; I never thought that I *could* be so happy,' said Fenella gravely.

'I've heard there's an old saying,

"*All's well as ends well,*" my dear, and I am sure *you* ought to be able to understand it. But I see you wear that old locket still, Miss Fenella.'

Fenella coloured, and put her hand up to her bosom, in which reposed the present that Geoffrey Doyne had given her.

'Oh yes! I promised I would wear this till my death, nurse. Nothing can make any difference to that, you know.'

'And don't Sir Gilbert notice it, my dear?'

'He has never mentioned it to me, and I don't think he ever will. He is not that sort of man. He has a soul above such trifles.'

'Ah, well! you got a lucky exchange,' replied the servant; but her young mistress turned the conversation, and she said no more.

As the weeks went on, however, and the influence of the dead woman was farther and farther removed from her, Bennett became at one and the same time

more confidential and more reserved with Lady Conroy. It seemed as though she had some revelation at the very tip of her tongue which she longed, and yet did not dare to make. The temptation seemed greatest when she was assisting Fenella with the usual preparations for the expected heir; and sometimes as together they inspected and arranged the lace and muslin and fine linen that arrived from London to fill the nursery wardrobe, Bennett seemed almost unable (as she herself expressed it) to keep her tongue between her teeth.

'Lor' bless us!' she exclaimed one day, as she tossed some baby-linen almost impatiently to one side; 'to think of the pounds and pounds as is thrown away just to decorate one infant, as you may say, whilst another poor little creature has hardly enough clothes to its back! If *I* was a fine lady, like you, my dear, with heaps of money to spend as I chose, I should give a little thought to them as

has none, if I wanted my own child to thrive and do well.'

Fenella looked up at this tirade, surprised but smiling.

'Dear nurse,' she said, 'I believe we give a great deal away annually in charity as it is, but if there are any particular cases of want that you know of, I shall be only too glad to relieve them. I should like to do it (as you say) in hopes it might come back in a blessing on my own baby.'

The servant looked mollified.

'You was always good and sweet, my dear, from a little child. You take after your blessed mamma in heaven for that. I daresay a lot of money *does* go from this house to the poor—and food, and blankets, and what not beside; but if I was to ask you, Miss Fenella, for a few pounds for a little one as has got no mother and no father (so to speak)—for such a little one as we might both have heard of, you know, in our day—what

would you say then, my dear? Would you give it?'

Fenella's trembling hands began to play at once with the fastening of her purse, from which she managed to extract a ten-pound note; but before she could hand it over to the servant, her fortitude gave way, and sinking down on her knees by the bedside, she burst into a flood of tears.

Bennett left her place, and approaching the spot where her mistress knelt, laid her hand gently on the bowed head.

'So you haven't forgotten yet, my lamb?' she whispered.

'*Forgotten!* My God! No; I shall never, *never* forget!'

She knelt for a few minutes in the same position, then rising suddenly, turned with an April smile upon the servant.

'Am I not silly, nurse?—as great a baby as when you brought me home from the convent? But here's the note for the little one you spoke of — and may

God bless it! And if there are any others that I can help in the same way, let me hear of them. I have more money, dear nurse, than I know how to spend; and I have less—less expenses than I might have had.'

The servant took the note and put it carefully away.

'Dear heart!' she thought, as Lady Conroy left the room. 'I'm sorely perplext to know what's best to be done. It seems so hard she shouldn't know; and yet, now she's living so happy and loving and grand, 'twould be a pity to rake up old scores. Well, this isn't the time, any way. She's got too much on her mind just now to think of anything else. And perhaps I need never tell her; it looks likely enough.'

And, indeed, at that moment Fenella had what is technically termed 'her hands full.' The castle was filled with Christmas visitors, amongst which were the Earl and Countess of Marjoram, who

had with them a cousin, Lord Laurence Grantham, a fine manly young fellow of five-and-twenty, who established himself from the very first as Fenella's chief friend and knight-errant. Lady Marjoram had not brought any of her children with her. She left home, she affirmed, to enjoy herself, and had no desire to keep her domestic miseries for ever in sight.

'You will be quite of my opinion in another year's time, my dear Fenella,' she said to her sister-in-law, 'and only too thankful to leave Portman Square or Conroy Castle, or wherever the nursery may be located, behind you. I positively begin to hate children, and believe they are only sent into this world to plague their parents out of it. Mine have had measles and hooping-cough already this year, and now they've all broken out with ringworm; so I couldn't stand it any longer, but packed the whole lot off to Bournemouth for the winter. There

they are, nine of them, with a governess and two nurses, eating their heads off, and sending us in weekly bills that make Marjoram swear in the most awful manner. It's no use laughing, Fenella. You'll laugh on the wrong side of your mouth some day, my dear. Wait till you have nine.'

'I hope I shall wait a long time,' rejoined Lady Conroy, who was much amused at her sister-in-law's indignation. 'But what is it that Lord Marjoram is speaking to Gilbert about?'

'About a vacant governorship at Sovooranooko, on the Gold Coast of Africa, my dear, where yellow fever and smallpox reign triumphantly from January to December, and elephants are shot for the sake of their steaks, and alligators appear at the breakfast-table *en papillotes* like sardines.'

'What interest can that have for Gilbert?' demanded Fenella, rather anxiously. 'He would never accept an appointment in such a climate as that?'

'He says he should enjoy it above all things, Lady Conroy,' interposed Lord Laurence Grantham mischievously. 'He is already consulting Marjoram now about the proper-sized "bore" for elephant-shooting, and they are going down to the stackyard after luncheon to practise alligator-spearing.'

'Oh, the poor cows!' laughed the Countess. 'Marjoram will most likely get a spear in the calf of his leg, and be out of temper for the rest of the day!'

'Gilbert! you would never really go to a place like Sovooranooko?' said Fenella. as she went up to her husband's side.

'My dear child, what nonsense! what are you thinking of?' replied Sir Gilbert. 'I am about as likely to go to Timbuctoo!'

'Oh no, you are not!' retorted his sister. 'There are no elephants there.'

But his wife was quite satisfied with his answer, and troubled her head no further in the matter.

When February came round again with its pale spring flowers, a little daughter was born at Conroy Castle. Sir Gilbert was excessively annoyed at the fact of its being a girl—more annoyed than Fenella had ever seen him during their married life. He had calculated so certainly upon having a son; it did not seem to have entered his head that he might have a daughter.

'Better luck next time, Bertie,' cried Lady Marjoram, who was still a guest at the castle; but her brother did not take the jest in good part.

'My dear, he's as cross as a bear!' she whispered afterwards to Fenella, who could not be put out of conceit with her little girl, although no one seemed to value her but herself; 'but it's always the way with men. They think the world was made for them, and it's a personal insult if they don't get their own way. Marjoram was just the reverse. *He* wanted a daughter, and I had five sons

in succession. I can remember his disgusted expression, when he used to exclaim, "*Another* boy! too bad—too bad!" as if *I* could help the young wretches being boys! At last a girl came, and then, of course, he spoilt her. She's the most odious brat of the lot. However, I don't think Bertie will spoil yours—not just yet, at all events.'

'I am afraid not,' said Fenella, with a sigh.

'Don't sigh over it, you muff; it's not *your* fault; and if Bertie begins any more grumbling, just give him a bit of your mind. You're too easy with him, Fenella. He's growing a regular bully! —No, nurse! don't ask me to kiss the baby, *please!* I daresay she's a very nice baby, and everything she ought to be; but, you see, I have nine of my own, and the gilt has somewhat worn off the gingerbread! In fact (not to put too fine a point upon it) the game's played out.'

And without another look at the infant, the lively Countess ran away.

The new-comer was left entirely to the admiration of its mother and nurses, but doubtless it fared none the worse for that.

'And she's come in *February* too,' remarked Bennett, significantly, to Fenella, as she cradled the little Conroy in her arms; 'that seems as if she was to be a special gift, my lady, doesn't it?'

This idea seemed to linger in the mind of the young mother, and when next she saw Sir Gilbert she asked him if their little girl might be called Theodora.

'Theodora—Theodora!' he repeated, wrinkling his brows. 'Why Theodora? It wasn't your mother's name, was it?'

'Oh no; mamma was called Rosina! But Theodora, you know, means "the gift of God."'

'Exactly so, though I don't see that this baby is more especially the gift of God than any other baby—do you?'

Fenella looked down at the child lying on her breast.

'She is such a *comfort* to me!' she answered, as she strained her to her heart.

'I am glad of that, dear,' said her husband, 'and I should like to indulge your fancy in the matter; but being the eldest daughter, I think she ought to be called after my mother, Lady Valeria; and so does Janie.'

'Valeria is such a *fine* name. It doesn't seem to *fit* her!' said Fenella dubiously.

'It is not so long as Theodora, at any rate,' laughed Sir Gilbert; 'however, Valeria, she must be, so I am sure you will not oppose yourself to what I think best.'

She had never done so yet, and was not likely to begin now. The baby was baptized in the name of Valeria, and Fenella soon became reconciled to a matter of so little importance. But when the child was about a month old, a real trial assailed her. Sir Gilbert Conroy was offered the governorship of Sovooranooko,

and decided to accept it. The temptation was too great for him. What real sportsman could resist the chance of bagging game in the African forests? Visions of elephants, rhinoceri, hippopotami, gorillas, elands, and buffalo floated rapturously through the baronet's brain, until he was no longer master of himself. He accepted the post without even consulting his wife in the matter, and made immediate arrangements for going up to town and purchasing every sort of weapon and equipment necessary for his expected experiences. Lord Laurence Grantham (as enthusiastic a sportsman as himself) was to accompany him as his private secretary, and much good might Sovooranooko expect to derive from their united services whilst a head of game remained within range of their rifles.

On first hearing the news of her husband's appointment, Fenella naturally supposed she was to accompany him.

'But will Sovooranooko be a good place

to take baby to?' she demanded timidly. 'Do you think the climate will agree with her, Gilbert?'

'My dear girl, what are you dreaming of? Drag a baby and suite after me into the centre of Africa? I'd as soon think of introducing a gorilla into your London drawing-room.'

'But how can I leave her behind, so young as she is?' she asked him.

'I don't wish you to leave her behind. I should no more think of risking your health than I should that of the child. No, my dear Fenella, this is not an expedition for women and children. Grantham and I shall spend half our time in the jungle, and what would you do without society, grilling away on the burning plains of Sovooranooko? It would kill you both.'

'But if it is so dangerous a climate, why do you go there, Gilbert?' she exclaimed, with a sudden outburst of affection. 'Why should you leave us for years, to hold an appointment which you do not

require, and from which you may never return?'

Sir Gilbert had to consider for a moment why he did do this thing, before he could answer his wife's question.

'Well, the reason, my dear, is obvious. I certainly do not actually require the appointment, nor do I admire the climate; but still it is a great honour conferred upon me, and my longing to have some sport in Central Africa has always been intense. In my position as governor of Sovooranooko, I shall not only have better opportunities of following the pursuit, but be able to penetrate farther and with greater security than I should otherwise be able to do. But as for my remaining away for *years*, that is nonsense. There is no necessity for me to go at all, and I can resign the appointment whenever I feel inclined.'

'Janie says, when you once get there, it is a question whether you will *ever* come back again,' said Fenella.

'Janie knows nothing about it. We certainly cannot commence following up the large game until a particular season of the year; but I shall not remain out there a minute longer than I find it pay me to do so. Meanwhile, Fenella, there is no need for you to mope. You will be a great deal with my sister, I hope, when you are in London; and the autumn you will spend at the sea-side, or wherever pleases you. Perhaps the Marjorams may ask you down to Southfield for Christmas. I am sure they will, if you evince the slightest disposition to join them. But since Dr M'Kenzie advises your going to some warmer place for the next few months, I shall not leave England until I have seen you comfortably settled at Nice, or wherever you like best.'

From the extreme cold of Scotland Fenella had developed a cough after her baby's birth. Had she been an ordinary patient it would have been treated with syrup of squills, but in the position of Sir

Gilbert Conroy's wife the family doctor considered it necessary to prescribe a visit to the south coast to expedite her cure; and, after some deliberation, Hyères in France was chosen for her temporary sojourn.

Sir Gilbert would have had his wife travel with a courier, and a flunky, and a couple of women, and engage the best suite of rooms in the best hotel. He was a man who loved pomp and show, and if there was an ungentlemanly trait in his character, it was his weakness to be thought a very big person, and to have everything belonging to him in equal style. Fenella pleaded hard to be excused the courier and the flunky, for neither of whom she had the slightest use; but she took Bennett and her lady's-maid with her, and permitted her husband to establish them in the hotel at Hyères, and impress the proprietor and attendants with a sense of the importance of Miladi Conroy, and the necessity that she should be supplied

with everything that was best and most expensive. And thus, having fulfilled the very letter of the law as a husband and protector, Sir Gilbert gave Fenella unlimited credit at his banker's, and parted with her as carelessly as if he had been running into the country for a fortnight's fishing.

His wife felt very lonely after he was gone—still more so when she heard that he had left England in the Cape steamer, and was on his way to Sovooranooko. She began to wish she had not left Conroy Castle, or that she had asked her sister-in-law to receive her as a guest at Southfield. But the Earl and Countess were paying a round of visits, and she would have been almost as lonely in either of those places as at Hyères. Then her lady's-maid (who had never been a favourite with Fenella) began to give her trouble. She was an independent, free-born Britisher, and not disposed to fall in kindly with any of the ways of 'them

nasty furriners.' She complained of the food and the accommodation; she couldn't 'abide' to see the invalids who had come to Hyères (perhaps only to die) being dragged about in their wheel-chairs; and she didn't understand 'hupper' servants being put to one side by 'nusses,' and such like—which being interpreted, meant that the lady's-maid was jealous of the confidences reposed in Bennett by her mistress.

'*Hif* her la'ship required her services, would she be good enough to say so? and *hif* her la'ship didn't, would she be good enough to let her go?'

When it came to this pointed appeal, Fenella found she could do very much better without her.

'Do send her away, my dear lady,' whispered Bennett. 'I can do everything that you and the baby require; and she's always got her ear at the keyhole, listening to every word we say.'

So the lady's-maid (much to her surprise and annoyance) was dismissed from

Lady Conroy's service, and sent back to England; and shortly after her departure Fenella removed from the hotel, and took a lovely little cottage standing in its own garden, on the outskirts of the town, where Bennett, and a *fille de quartier* hired in Hyères, rendered her all the assistance she required.

These may appear to be trifling and unnecessary details, but they exerted a strong influence upon her future conduct. Here, in this solitude, with no society but that of Eliza Bennett and her little infant, Fenella lapsed into very low spirits. Her life had become calm and contented, but it was not sufficiently happy to bear the strain of her own thoughts, without the outward distraction of cheerful company and lively surroundings. Left to herself, she was too apt to dream; and dreaming revealed a state of mind that half frightened her. She was sadly disappointed, too, at Sir Gilbert leaving her for Sovooranooko, although she would not acknowledge it,

even to herself. But she had begun to lean upon the fact that he was her husband; to misconstrue the courtesy and deference (which he would have shown to any woman) as marks of love for herself, and to deceive her own heart into the belief that she loved him in return. And yet he had left her for an indefinite period, whilst he ran all the risks attendant on an unhealthy climate and a dangerous pursuit; and Fenella could not help recognising her true place in his estimation. She was Lady Conroy, his wife, and the possible mother of his heir—that was all. As for the poor little girl in the cradle, he had not even looked at her before he went away. She was a female, of no consequence at all in his family tree; that she was her mother's child gave her no individual claim upon her father's heart. But the little Valeria (now three months old) was daily becoming more engaging in Fenella's eyes, who thought that a lovelier specimen of babyhood had never existed.

And she was partly right. The infant was unusually large and fat for her age—too much so, indeed, for health, as the sequel proved. For one day, as the little creature was lying, flushed and rosy in her sleep, she was seized (without the slightest warning) with a convulsion, from which she never recovered. Bennett (who had frequently seen infants in fits before) plunged her at once into a warm bath, and held her there until the convulsions had ceased. But when they were over, life was over too. The beautiful baby had closed her blue eyes upon this world for ever, and Bennett was forced to break the intelligence to her mistress. The *fille de quartier* was sent flying into Hyères for a doctor, but he only arrived to confirm the nurse's opinion. The spirit of the little child was gone beyond recall—'if he could be of any other use to Miladi he would be but too happy, but as for *this*,' shrugging his shoulders, 'he was *accomblé* with regret to say it—but no one could help Miladi *here*.'

It was some time before Fenella could be made to believe that her infant was really dead. But when the doctor had departed, and the little body was laid out, stiff and white, upon the bed, her agony was overwhelming.

'There is a curse upon me, Bennett,' she cried, as she fell, sobbing, on her knees beside the corpse. 'God is still angry with me! I shall never be the mother of a living child!'

'No, no! my dear lady; don't say that, for it isn't the truth. Oh, if I only dared to tell you!' said Bennett, with the tears streaming down her own face.

'You cannot tell me anything to give me comfort,' replied Fenella, as she rocked herself to and fro. 'They all leave me; no one stays with me! I believe I am doomed to live and die alone! *What* had I, nurse — *whom* had I—but this little child? and God has taken even her away! Oh! it is cruel —it is *cruel* of Him! He might have

left me *one* of them, just to save my heart from breaking!'

The servant, who was almost as upset as her mistress, sat by her side all night long, and never left her for one moment to herself.

On the evening of the next day (according to the custom of that part of the country) Fenella's child was buried, and the little house seemed as if it had died itself—it was so empty and still and forlorn.

Lady Conroy had wept until her sight was dull and her face sodden; she had paced up and down the room until she had nearly fainted from fatigue and want of nourishment; but still she could not rest. She moved about incessantly, with dry eyes, but burning cheeks, recalling every incident in her baby's short life which could increase her grief and heighten her despair. At last she made a dart at her blotting-case.

'I cannot write to Sir Gilbert,' she

said, 'until I have heard of his arrival at Sovooranooko; but I must let Lady Marjoram know the news at once. They would never forgive me if I kept them in ignorance of such an event. Though I don't suppose any of them will care if she is alive or dead. No one loved her but myself. My darling little Valeria! my poor lost baby!'

She sat down with the blotting-book in her hand, and burst into a fresh flood of tears. This was the moment Bennett had been watching for. As the tempest of Fenella's grief subsided, she found her faithful dependant close at hand.

'Don't write this evening, my darling child,' she said affectionately; 'you ain't fit for it. Let it be till to-morrow, for there's something as I want to tell you.'

'Tell it me afterwards, dear Bennett. Let me write my letters first,' pleaded Fenella. 'It will do me good to have some occupation. Besides, we must leave this place, nurse. I can't stay here, now

my baby's gone. I should fancy I heard her voice crying every minute.'

'Yes, yes! my dear lady,' replied Bennett soothingly; 'and you know as you can do exactly as you choose in all things. Only there's something as I want to tell you, my dear, and I've wanted to tell it you for months and months past, only I didn't dare; but the time's come now, I'm sure, and I don't feel as if I should do right to keep it to myself any longer. I think it will be a comfort to you, and yet how to begin the story I don't know.'

The woman's manner was so earnest and yet full of mystery, as she walked to the door and locked it, lest they should be interrupted, that Fenella's curiosity was immediately aroused.

'Nurse, what is it you can have to tell me that requires so much preparation? Is it anything to do with poor mamma?'

'Well, it has and it hasn't, Miss Fenella; and I expect you'll be so sur-

prised, you'll hardly believe as I'm telling you the truth. But you mustn't blame me, my dear, for I can call Heaven to witness as I never did anything in this world but what I thought was for your good.'

'What on earth is it?' cried Fenella, as the blotting-case slid to the ground. 'I begin to be frightened, nurse. Surely it cannot be more bad news for me?'

'No, no, my lamb. I think you'll say as it's good news, and I am sure you will say I am right to tell it you. Do you remember the time, Miss Fenella, when you was so ill at Sainte Pauvrette?'

Lady Conroy shuddered.

'Ah, Bennett, as if I could *ever* forget it! It is the one great black spot in my life.'

'Your mamma told you then, miss, as your baby was dead, and you cried bitterly for it's loss, didn't you?'

The tears streamed afresh down Fenella's face. The old wound had recalled the new.

'Oh yes, I did! My poor wee baby that never saw the light! God might have left me *this* one (mightn't He, nurse?) just to help me to forget the other.'

'And what should you say, my dear,' continued Bennett, as she softly stroked the girl's hand; 'what should you say, now, if I was to tell you as your first baby —the baby that was born at Sainte Pauvrette—was still alive?'

Lady Conroy half sprung from her seat, and stared into the servant's face incredulously.

But my mother — my *mother*,' she panted, 'told me it was born dead—that it never even breathed on entering the world!'

'My mistress didn't tell the truth then, Miss Fenella—God forgive her! That child was born alive, and is living now.'

'But I never saw it, nurse! I never heard it cry!'

'I daresay not, my dear, or you don't

remember it. But you were raving with fever all the time, and the baby was safe in England long before you came to your senses again.'

'But you showed me her grave!' continued Lady Conroy, with eyes wide open with surprise. 'You pointed out a little mound to me in Sainte Pauvrette churchyard, and told me my poor baby lay beneath it, and I left violets and primroses there for her sake.'

'My dear, I did; and I'm not going to deny it. They was your poor mamma's orders, and I obeyed them, as I've obeyed many an order of hers that's laid on my conscience since. But it was untrue, Miss Fenella. I took your dear baby myself to England the very day she was born, and she's living there to this hour. And that's God's truth, my lamb, if I never utter another word on this side the grave!'

Fenella stood still and silent for one moment, as if to try and grasp the truth

of this unexpected revelation. Then with a cry of indignation she bounded to her feet.

'And *my mother* did this!' she exclaimed. '*My mother*, who brought me into the world, and knew all that I had suffered! She stepped into the place of God and bereaved me of my child! How did she *dare* to do it?' she went on fiercely, as she confronted Eliza Bennett. 'How did *you* dare to uphold her in such a falsehood? What right had you to conspire together to steal my child from me—*his* child—and leave me to the desolation and despair that followed? How did you *dare* — how did you DARE to do it?'

She paced up and down the room as she spoke, alarming Bennett beyond measure by her heightened colour and rapid utterance.

'Say what you like to me, Miss Fenella,' she replied piteously; 'I daresay I did very wrong, though I acted under

orders. But don't go to blame your dear mamma as is a saint in heaven. She did it for the best, my dear; she thought to save you the shame and the distress it might prove in after-years. We talked a deal together about it before we decided what to do, but the little one's been safe and well with my sister Martha ever since, and you'll be able to see her now whenever you like. And oh! do stop walking in that fashion, my dear, for if you fall ill, I shall never forgive myself for having told you; but I thought maybe it might be a comfort for you to hear, now that the other dear baby's gone.'

Fenella stopped short, and flung herself on her knees by the old woman's side.

'It *is* a comfort, dear Bennett,' she said; 'but tell me the truth—don't deceive me any more—is she really alive?'

'She *is* alive, my dear. She's a poor creature, as might be expected, brought up by hand; but she's alive and well.'

'And what is she like, nurse? Oh, tell me what my child is like.'

'She ain't so good-looking as the angel that's gone, Miss Fenella, but I should think she'd take after you when she fills out a bit. She's very backward, poor lamb; she can't say a word, and she's got no use of her legs. But Martha's took every care of her, and couldn't love her better if she were her own.'

'And—and—does Martha know that she belongs to *me*, nurse?' asked Lady Conroy hesitatingly.

'Bless your heart, *no!* Do you think I'd go to pull down the family in *that* way, Miss Fenella? In course not! I said 'twas a child belonging to a friend of my mistress, and they didn't ask no questions. Why should they? They've been paid reg'lar ever since.'

'Who has paid them, Bennett?'

'Well, your dear mamma did up to her death, my lady, and since that your ten-pound note has kept them going till such

time as I could make up my mind to tell you the truth.'

'Oh, if I could see her! if I could only see her!' cried Fenella, clasping her hands.

'My dear, I don't see why you shouldn't, and that's why I wanted to tell you my story before you wrote to Lady Marjoram.'

'What has that to do with it, Bennett? I couldn't tell *her*, you know.'

'I should think not! You'll be very soft if you tell any one now. Let the matter rest between you and me, my dear. But ain't it next to a moral certainty as Sir Gilbert will be out in that African place for some years?'

'I believe so. For two or three years, without doubt, unless some accident sends him home.'

"Well, then, Miss Fenella, I'd risk it!'

'Risk what, Bennett?'

'I'd have that baby home in place of the

one that's gone, and trust to his never finding out the difference.'

'Nurse! what are you thinking of? My first baby must be fifteen months old by this time.'

'I know she is, my dear, and of course you couldn't manage it if you was in England, or Sir Gilbert likely to come home soon. But she's a puny little thing, you must be prepared for that; and though you couldn't pass her off now for a baby of three months, I warrant that when she's three years you will be very well able to pass her off as a child of two. And Sir Gilbert is not a gentleman to fuss over children, you know. He'll never put his foot in the nursery if he can help it. I believe you might bring up half-a-dozen there without his being any the wiser.'

'Lady Marjoram?' faltered Fenella.

'I'll manage the Countess, my dear. You see, if you fall in with my notion, you must say the baby's delicate, and leave her with me when you go to Lon-

don for the season. Lady Marjoram will never trouble you with any questions about her.'

'Oh, if I *could*—if I only could!' cried the mother, with a new hope beaming in her eyes. 'My poor neglected baby! my poor fatherless lamb! I *must* have her back again.'

'It would do my heart good to see her in your arms,' said Bennett, 'for it smites me every time I go to Ines-cedwyn and look at the poor little thing. For 'tain't *her* fault, you see, Miss Fenella; *she* ain't the one to blame, pretty dear; and it seems terrible hard she should grow up without any one to love her as she has a claim to, and no more knowledge than can be got in Ines-cedwyn.'

'She never shall!' exclaimed Lady Conroy; 'I will claim her and look after her, even if I am not able to bring her up by my side. Bennett! Bennett!' she continued, in a lower voice, as she pulled the old woman's face close down to

her own, 'tell me, *dear* Bennett, is she at all like *him?*'

'Lor'! Miss Fenella, why should you go to ask me such a thing? I'm sure I don't know, my dear, and I hopes, for your sake, as she's not, for you ought to have forgotten all about him long and long ago.'

Lady Conroy hid her face in the servant's bosom.

'Oh yes! I know I *ought*, and I think I have too (nearly, that is to say), only this stirs it up, you see, Bennett—it stirs it up.'

'But has it comforted you, my dear lady, or have I made matters worse by my chattering?'

'No, no! May God Almighty bless you, Bennett, for having told me that my baby lives. It has comforted me as nothing else in this world could have done. It has almost reconciled me to giving back the other one to Heaven.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE INDISSOLUBLE LINK.

'Child of my love! essence of all things fair,
Sweet outcome of my happy, hopeful youth,
Sweet mem'ry of thy father's passionate truth,
Come nearer; let me feel that thou art there.
Give me thy hand—'twas thus I held his own;
Look in my eyes—'twas thus I gaz'd in his;
Kiss me for him—one fervent, long-drawn kiss—
And tell me that we part for earth alone.'

HOW will it be possible to adequately describe Fenella's feelings at this juncture, so as to make those who read of them judge her leniently? No *man* could do it; no man could even understand the emotions that passed through her mind, or enter into the passion that actuated her conduct.

A man must stand on one side and be dumb. And neither could a woman, unless she had been a mother, and received back her child, as it were, from the dead; even a woman must have passed through similar circumstances before she could comprehend the difficult position in which Fenella was placed. Picture her wild surprise on hearing that the child of her love —the child of the man whom she could not forget—still lived, and was dependent on her; that somewhere in this wide world it stretched tiny arms to the empty air, yearning for a mother's tenderness; and then think of the impossibility of her telling the secret to any one—of the impossibility of her having the infant with her at all unless she stooped to a deception which seemed innocent beside the crime of disowning it. Once made aware of its existence, Fenella could not close her eyes to her responsibility. She could not have done it under any circumstances, for her heart was that of a true

mother, and she would have gone forth into the world, if needful, with her baby in her arms, and supported it by the most menial of labour, sooner than have confided it any longer to the care of strangers.

But there was another motive working in her breast, a motive for which the world (who embraces coroneted courtesans) will be the most ready to condemn her,—she loved the father of her child with every fibre of her heart. It was her greatest sin, this impossibility to be faithless and forget. Let it be written down against her. This is not the history of a saint. It only professes to be the record of an erring woman's life.

But Fenella did not intend at first to follow Bennett's suggestion in all its details. It is questionable, indeed, if she ever intended to do so, for she was true by nature (as has already been pointed out), and it was only the greater passion fighting against the lesser that

made her untrue to her nature now. It is the same with all of us when brought face to face with the greatest difficulties of our lives—the master-passion (whichever it may be) prevails. And Fenella's master-passion—whether it demonstrated itself in one phase or another—was love.

When the wonder and the surprise of the revelation had somewhat subsided—when she had heard every detail that the nurse could give her of the circumstances under which her infant had been placed in the charge of Martha Bennett, and was thoroughly convinced that there was a living being dependent upon her alone for care and support and affection in the future, then all the mother's love came welling forth, and Fenella felt as if she could not rest until she held her child in her arms.

Bennett did not fail to improve the occasion. Her conscience had sorely upbraided her for taking part in the deception even from the beginning, but she had

been a tool in the hands of Mrs Barrington, and had simply done as her mistress commanded her. But the spell was broken now; the magnetic chain which the frivolous woman of fashion seemed to have woven about the will of her dependant was snapt in two, and Eliza Bennett could once more think and speak for herself. She impressed the truth on Lady Conroy that, if she was ever to act in the matter, it must be then; that next year, even next month, might be too late; and that it would give her incalculable trouble, and the child incalculable disadvantages (not only now, but in the future), if she were not brought up by her side.

'Just think what she may be, fifteen or twenty years hence, my lady. Why, the very thought makes me shudder! Even if you was to give her the best of homes and education, where is she to go when she's a grown lady?—for a lady she is, my dear, and nothing can't unmake her that. And for my part, it seems a moral duty to

me that you should have her home; and, if I may make so bold as to say it, God Almighty seems to have paved the way for you Himself.'

'I intend to reclaim her, Bennett; don't have any fear of that. Do you think I could be so cruel and cowardly as to leave my own little child, that I brought into the world, to grow up without knowing that I am her mother?' exclaimed Fenella. 'Oh no! it is only the *means* of doing it that perplexes me. It can never be justifiable to deceive, you know. And if they should ever find it out—'

'Well, my dear, I shouldn't worry myself about that matter now; and you can do as you think best with respect to Sir Gilbert afterwards. There can never be no call for you to tell Lady Marjoram, surely.'

'Oh no, no!'

'Take a week or two to think over it,' suggested the servant; 'second thoughts is always best. And meanwhile I can

fetch the little one, that you may have a look at her.'

Fenella's eyes sparkled with a sudden joy.

'But when, Bennett—*when?* How soon can you go?'

'You won't have her *here*, Miss Fenella,' said the woman dubiously.

'I'll do just what you think best.'

'I'd like you to move farther on, my dear—to some place where you are not likely to meet any of your fine friends; and then when your settled, I'll go over quietly and bring the child back with me.'

'We will go to St Pré,' said Lady Conroy; 'there is no one there at this time of the year.'

She was burning with anxiety to clasp her baby in her arms. She would have stripped herself of every earthly possession to attain her object. She could think of nothing else until it was accomplished.

Yet the time which Fenella passed alone in the little *auberge* of St Pré, during the

two or three days that her servant was necessarily absent in England, was one of great perplexity to her. A dozen plans for telling the truth, and yet keeping her first-born by her side, darted into her mind, and had to be as summarily rejected. Her husband knew every particular of her former history—of *that* she felt certain—it had never entered her head for a moment that it could be otherwise; but, of course, Mrs Barrington had told him the same falsehood she did to herself, and he believed the baby to be dead. *What* would he say if he were told it lived? Would he not order her never to see it again, never to speak of it—to bury the fact of its existence in oblivion, as he had desired her to bury the remembrance of its birth? And Fenella felt this was what she could not do. A chord had been struck in her breast which vibrated through her whole body. Her child lived! The life that was one with hers had not been quenched, and whilst it existed they must exist together.

Yet she could not make up her mind what to do, and she put the question from her as something to be settled in the future. But she did not write to announce the death of little Valeria to Lady Marjoram, and so the first thread was woven of the net in which her life was to become entangled.

On the evening on which she had been led to expect Bennett back again from Ines-cedwyn, Lady Conroy behaved like a wild creature. Her suspense, her agitation, her anxiety were so extreme, that she was compelled to go and lock herself into her own room, that she might be able to pace the floor, and laugh, and cry, and talk to herself, as she felt inclined, without the fear of making the inmates of the *auberge* say she had gone mad. At last, after hours of restless expectation, Fenella heard a bustle on the stairs, accompanied by a fretful cry. She threw open her bedroom door, and stood panting on the threshold.

'Give her to me!' she cried impetu-

ously, as Bennett approached with a bundle in her arms.

'Oh, my lady, be careful! you'll frighten the child to death.'

But Fenella was not in a condition to listen to any advice. She hastily tore open the shawl that enveloped the infant, and met the gaze of two startled blue eyes, shaded by dark lashes; a little white face, hardly bigger than that of the child she had just lost, surrounded by rings of silky brown hair; and a sad drooping mouth that had just puckered itself up for another cry. She pounced upon the baby like a tigress on its prey, and clasped her vehemently to her bosom.

'Take care, my dear; pray take care,' repeated the servant fearfully. 'Don't forget she's just come off a long journey, and everything is strange to her.'

But the mother had got the child's face close to her own; she saw nothing but the child—she heard nothing but the throbbing of her own heart beneath which God had called it into being.

'*Baby*,' she murmured, in a soft, tremulous voice; 'baby, do you know I am your mother?'

The sweet pathos in her tones attracted the little one's attention. She had just been going to cry, but she thought better of it, and smiled instead.

'She *knows* me!' Fenella cried triumphantly. 'She recognises me, nurse. She sees something in my face she has been waiting for.'

'Bless her heart!' said Eliza Bennett, with the stereotyped nursery benediction, 'she's been good as gold all the way coming over, and Martha was finely put out parting with her, I can tell you; but I said as her mamma had come back from the Injies, and wanted to look after her herself. And I give her the money you sent, my dear, and she considered it most handsome, and she hopes that the child's things (such as they are) will be found in decent order; but, of course, it's little she's been able to do for her

that way, for what your dear mamma paid her, though ample, didn't leave much and above over for clothes. But we'll soon put that to rights, won't we, my lady? It'll be quite a pleasure to me to dress the little dear in decent things. But she is a rare little one—ain't she now?'

Bennett might have gone on talking till doomsday, for Fenella was not listening to a word she said. Her eyes, dim with unshed tears, were riveted upon the child, who lay in her arms, passive and contented, as if she knew where she had got to. Suddenly the blue eyes glistened, the tiny fingers were stretched upward, and in another moment had firmly grasped a gold locket which had escaped from the bosom of Fenella's dress. The last pledge that Geoffrey Doyne had given her, in token of his unalterable fidelity, lay in the hands of his child. At that sight Lady Conroy's tears fell like rain. She turned her face aside,

and hid it in the cushion of the sofa upon which she was seated.

'You have been unfaithful to me,' she murmured inwardly; 'you left me without a thought whether I might not be destroyed, body and soul, by your desertion; but I will not desert your child. Whatever may happen to me in consequence—whatever I may lose, or give up, or have to resign, I pledge myself here to redeem as much of *my* past as is possible to me, by devoting the rest of my life to the life you created. O Geoffrey! Geoffrey! why did you not take mine before you laid this burden on my soul?'

Bennett perceived that Fenella was weeping, and came at once to the rescue.

'Now, my lady, please, we mustn't have anything of this sort. I shall be sorry I've brought the baby over here, if she's to be a misery to you instead of a comfort. Lor'! what has she got now?

That there nasty locket! I thought there was something of that kind in the wind. Now, my little dear, you please to give that up, and come to Bennett. 'Twould have been a deal better for your poor mamma if she'd never seen the trumpery thing, nor the one as give it to her neither. Come, my lady, let me take her, and you rest yourself on the sofa, whilst I feed her and put her to bed. She'll sleep without rocking to-night, I warrant.'

But Fenella would not be parted from her new-found treasure. Together the women undressed and washed the infant, and put it to sleep in the nurse's bed. And late that night, when the inmates of the little hotel had long retired, and Eliza Bennett thought that her mistress too was wrapt in slumber, a white-robed figure stole softly to her side, and a low voice whispered,—

'Is she sleeping, nurse? Has she taken her food? Are you sure she is quite comfortable and well?'

'Bless you, yes! my lady. The dear child's sleeping like an angel! Just look at her little face upon the piller. Ain't she like a little wax doll—the pretty dear! But do go back to your bed, Miss Fenella, for you'll get your death of cold standing about these nasty painted boards.'

'I'll go back directly, nurse; but couldn't you bring her and lay her by my side? I think I could go to sleep if I knew that she was there.

'Lor'! my dear, you'd never rest with a baby in your bed. It's terrible, till you're used to them.'

'I think I could—and I would like to try; do wrap a shawl round her and bring her to me. You don't know how my heart does ache! I think if I had my baby next it, it would be a little comfort to me.'

Bennett did not attempt any further remonstrance, but lifting up the sleeping child, carried it into the next room and laid it by its mother's side. And when she crept in again towards the early morn-

ing, to see how they both fared, she found them in the same position and fast asleep, the infant's tiny face nestled in Fenella's bosom. The servant stood and gazed at them until her eyes filled with tears.

'Well,' she thought to herself, 'if to bring them two together is a sin, may God forgive me! but I can't see it. Poor little mite! don't she look as if she'd got home at last? And my sweet young lady, too, is dreaming a happy dream with that smile upon her lips. May God bless 'em both! And if any harm comes of it, I'll work to keep 'em to my life's end.'

And Fenella too, with this new legitimate love awakened in her bosom at the very moment when it felt so empty and so cold, was ready to resign the world itself, if necessary, sooner than give up her child again. It seemed to her as if she had never really known what it was to be a mother until she clasped her in her arms, and before she had regained possession of her for a week her infant

had become her idol. She could not bear her to go out of her sight; she was always in terror lest some ill should happen to her; and she spent her days in studying the tiny features, and watching the development of the tardily awakening intellect. She was scarcely ever out of her mother's arms; day after day Fenella's tall, lithe figure might be seen traversing the byroads and field paths around St Pré, with the fragile baby clasped to her breast; and the affection of the English lady for her little child was the observation of every one. And yet Fenella was not happy. In her case the saying, '*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute,*' was eminently true. In delaying to write and announce the death of Sir Gilbert's child to Lady Marjoram, she had taken that first step which she would never be able to retrace; and as day succeeded day, and the time drew near for her return to London, she felt that she must adopt Bennett's suggestion and

keep her own counsel, whether she wished it or not, for there was no possibility of disclosing the truth at that date.

When May arrived she parted from her child with many tears, and leaving it at St Pré under the charge of her nurse and a French *bonne*, travelled to England with her lady's-maid (a new acquisition imported from Paris) to spend the London season under the wing of her sister-in-law.

Lady Marjoram was delighted to receive Lady Conroy, and equally delighted to hear that she had left the baby behind her.

'My dear, how sensible and nice you are! One would believe you were eight-and-twenty instead of eighteen. I can't tell you how I have been dreading the advent of your nursery brigade—not, of course, that they could make any difference to me with my terrible tribe, only I was afraid you'd be running upstairs to see if the little animal was dead or alive

twenty times a-day, and wanting to stuff it, with its nurse, on the back seat of the carriage whenever we drove in the park, and all that sort of thing. So interesting you know, my dear, and so abominably disagreeable!'

'I am afraid you must have a very small idea of my common sense, Janie,' replied Fenella, colouring. 'I confess I was very sorry to leave my little girl behind me, but I thought it best for her—particularly as we shall be out, I suppose, day and night.'

'Indeed, we shall, Fenella. This promises to be the gayest season we have had for years. My engagement list is something terrible to look at already. By the way, the Culletons are going to have a series of *tableaux vivants* and private theatricals at Fotheringay House in June and July, and I have promised faithfully that you will assist them. They want the loan of your voice, too, for some amateur concerts. I hope

you have not neglected your singing lately?'

'No; I have had a piano wherever I went, and practised assiduously, and I intend to take another course of lessons from Signor Possetrina. By the way, Janie, I have not yet shown you Gilbert's last letter. He seems quite delighted with Sovooranooko, and talks of having me out there next year to judge of it for myself.'

'Don't you believe a word of that, my dear; it's only a sop for Cerberus. Bertie has no more idea of having you out to Sovooranooko than of coming home himself. We had a letter from Lord Laurence by last mail, and he says Bertie is mad to get into the interior, and already organising a shooting party to start as soon as the cool weather commences. He has got the Englishman's mania on him to "kill something," Fenella, and the best thing you can do is to let him tire himself out. He'll get a grab from

a lion or a squeeze from a bear some day, and come crying home to you to kiss the place and make it well; but he won't come before. And what should you want to go out to that horrid place for—to lose your complexion and your hair, and perhaps get the yellow fever, or some pleasantry of that sort? Don't you be so silly. You had better stay at home with the baby than do that.'

'Oh yes! I don't want to leave my baby,' cried the mother, with a sudden thrill.

'Well, you couldn't take her with you, so let's talk no more about it. Besides, it is time we went to dress. We have a concert at the Duke of Doldrum's at two.'

The next three months were spent by Fenella in a round of dissipation, during which she distinguished herself in theatricals and at concerts, and heard her talents talked of as much as her beauty had been the year before.

But her heart and all her thoughts were at St Pré. She required *bulletins* to be sent her daily of the health and well-doing of her child, and she bought every dainty little garment or expensive toy she could light upon, to decorate the body, or amuse the mind, of her absent baby.

Lady Marjoram noticed this almost feverish anxiety and restlessness on the part of her sister-in-law concerning her child, and laughed at it. 'It was very becoming,' she said patronisingly, and just as it ought to be, she wished she could get up the same sort of excitement about her own brats. It gave one such a pretty flush to be anxious, and one's eyes looked so quick and bright about the time that the post was expected.

But for all that, Lady Marjoram did not quite believe in the genuineness of Fenella's concern, and she could no more have entered into her real feelings respecting her child than she could sympathise

with Sir Gilbert's exultation at bringing down an elephant. The one sensation was as much a sealed book to her as the other. However, as soon as the season was over, Lady Conroy flew to the side of her child again, and shed tears of real joy, because it held out arms of welcome as soon as it recognised her.

The Earl and Countess of Marjoram were bound for Norway that year, and as soon as they had left England, Fenella brought her little party over, and established them in a lovely Devonshire village by the sea, where she spent all her days upon the beach with the little Valeria in her arms. For the infant who had been unbaptized when restored to its mother, had of course to be called by the name of the one whose place she assumed.

And here it was, whilst yielding herself up to the softening influence which nature generally exerts on a mind fitted to perceive and appreciate her beauties, and whilst watching the daily growing resem-

blance to her father in the face of her little child, that Fenella began to have gentler and more generous thoughts of Geoffrey Doyne. For since the day on which she received the shock of hearing of his marriage, the remembrance of him had been fraught with torture to her. He had never come into her mind but to suggest something that was most cruel and heartless and untrue. She had tried to shut out the memory even of the time she knew him, as of some horrible dream that to dwell upon would madden her. But now, as little Valeria's baby lips met hers, as she watched her toddle feebly from one spot to another, as she heard her faltering tongue trying to frame the syllables of '*mother*,' the child's angel whispered to her thoughts of forgiveness and of mercy, and from the child's eyes there beamed a look that softened her recollection of the past.

In fancy, Fenella saw again the flowery landslip, strewn with fallen petals—fallen

ike her hopes! she saw the golden sands, the ruined bungalow, the stretch of placid sea, and blue unclouded sky; and then above, beyond them all, in beauty and in pleasantness, the smile, the look, the tones of Geoffrey Doyne. And she began to make excuses for him—she, who had called him (and justly) by all sorts of hard and ugly names, whose life had been ruined by his desertion—she began to wonder if some dark mystery might not lie at the bottom of his apparent cruelty; whether he could have been told falsehoods of her, or been forced into that marriage that broke her heart; whether he might not believe that she was dead, or had refused ever to see or speak to him again. A hundred reasons, all equally vague and improbable, floated through Fenella's mind as she attempted, in her loving generosity, to account for as dastardly a piece of cruelty as ever a man employed to wreck a woman's life.

She could not satisfy herself. Her own

nature was too true to accept any excuse for his conduct, still less for the silence which preceded and followed it; yet she tried so hard, '*for baby's sake*,' she would say to herself with quivering lips, to make out the father of her child less undeserving than he was.

But often (after Fenella had been thinking thus for hours) she would catch her infant in her arms and sob over it in so piteous a manner, that the little creature would weep with terror. And then Fenella would soothe it, and kiss it, and sing to it, until it smiled again, and whisper in its ear that its mother would always love it for its father's sake, although he had trampled on her heart as if it had been the ground beneath his feet.

Meanwhile, the little Valeria grew strong and fat, but still remained so tiny that Bennett's prophecies concerning her apparent age seemed likely to be verified, and when the second London season dawned upon the world, Fenella ventured

to send her with her nurses up to Conroy Castle, where she remained until her mother could rejoin her.

'Really, Fenella,' exclaimed Lady Marjoram, 'you are getting too absurdly domestic! Why should you go and bury yourself all alone in Scotland with that child? Why cannot you spend the autumn at Southfield with us? I shall be horribly dull without you.'

'I thought, Janie, that as I had not been at the castle all last year, and Gilbert talks of returning in the spring, he might consider it my duty to go and look after the place a little.'

'My dear girl, what rubbish! Who do you suppose looked after it all the years before he met you? Bertie was never there, except for the shooting. He was better employed elsewhere, I can tell you. Now, do come down to Southfield with me! It will be a perfect charity. And send for the child and nurses to

join you there, as I know you will not come without her.'

'No, I will not come without her,' replied Fenella, smiling; and so Bennett was written to, and in due course appeared with her baby and her *aide-de-camp* at Southfield.

'And now, pray let us see this wonderful baby,' exclaimed the Countess, on the first day as they sat together after dinner. 'Your devotion to her is so extraordinary that it has excited my curiosity. I expect a *rara avis*. Give your orders, Fenella, for Bennett to bring the young lady down to dessert.'

Lady Conroy looked uneasy.

'I think you had better not see her now,' she said; 'you don't like children, and she is very shy with strangers, and will most likely cry.'

'Never mind! if she cries, we'll send her back again,' replied Lady Marjoram, who always liked to have her own way. 'I think it is quite time I made the

acquaintance of my niece. Let me see! How old is she?'

'Eighteen months,' said Fenella, in a low voice.

'Quite grown up, I declare,' laughed her sister-in-law. 'Send for her at once. The girls are so precocious now-a-days, that at this rate she will be married before I see her.'

The order was given, and in a few minutes a tap was heard upon the dining-room door, and Bennett entering, set down with much pride upon the carpet a tiny creature, dressed in lace and ribbons, of about two feet high, who stood the centre of attraction, looking with scared and wistful eyes upon the strangers.

'Baby!' said Fenella, in her sweet, low voice.

The little figure fluttered like a blue-and-white butterfly, and then with a cry of pleasure tottered to her mother's side, and laid her curly head against her knee. Fenella lifted her in her arms, and pressed

her glowing face in the folds of the infant's frock.

'What a little fairy,' cried the Countess. 'She looks as if she had just stepped, ready dressed, out of the Soho Bazaar! Marjoram! why don't my children make a rush at me like that? Why do they always hang back and stick their fingers in their mouths, and their heads in the nurse's apron? Look at that child! stroking Fenella's face like a grown being! I should get quite fond of a baby if it showed as much sense as that.'

'She has always been with me,' said Fenella ingenuously.

'That's it,' acquiesced the Earl. 'Lady Conroy has nursed her child, and you leave yours to a set of hirelings.'

'Hold your tongue, Marjoram! you don't know anything about it. How old did you say she was, Fenella? Can she talk?'

'Very little, Janie. She can only say "mother," and "father," and "Bennie."'

'And whom does she resemble? Turn her face round, my dear, that I may see it,' continued Lady Marjoram.

Fenella grew crimson.

'They say she is very like *me*,' she answered, with a rapidly beating heart.

'Not a bit of it,' cried the Countess. 'She's the very image of Bertie! The hair's a trifle darker, perhaps, but that is the only difference I can see. I shall tell him so in my next letter. Well, Bennett, you can take Miss Conroy away now if you like, and I think she is a very fine little girl for her age, and does you a great deal of credit.'

'Thank you, my lady,' replied the servant, as she disengaged the clinging arms from about her mistress's neck, and conveyed little Valeria out of sight again.

After that interview Fenella's heart grew secure, and she took her child about with her wherever she went.

Since she had passed the crucible of

Lady Marjoram's scrutiny, she considered that all risk of discovery was over; and so much does custom become our second nature, that at times Fenella almost forgot what she had done, and detected herself waking with a start, to remember that Valeria was not Sir Gilbert Conroy's child. That is, she contrived to lull her uneasy conscience to sleep respecting the deception she had practised, so long as it seemed to concern no one but herself. But the day arrived when the person who had been most injured by the transaction reappeared upon the scene, and from that moment the heart of Fenella reasserted itself, and refused to be quieted by any specious arguments that tried to make a wrong thing look as if it were right.

With the return of spring came Sir Gilbert Conroy from Sovooranooko. He had not resigned his appointment, but he required change of air and relaxation, and had procured so many months' leave to England in consequence. He came back

accompanied by his private secretary, and laden with the spoils of the chase, in excellent humour with the world, his wife, himself, and everybody belonging to him. But with the first kiss of welcome he bestowed upon her, all Fenella's fancied serenity fled like a dream, and for the first time she saw what she had done in its true light.

END OF VOL. II.

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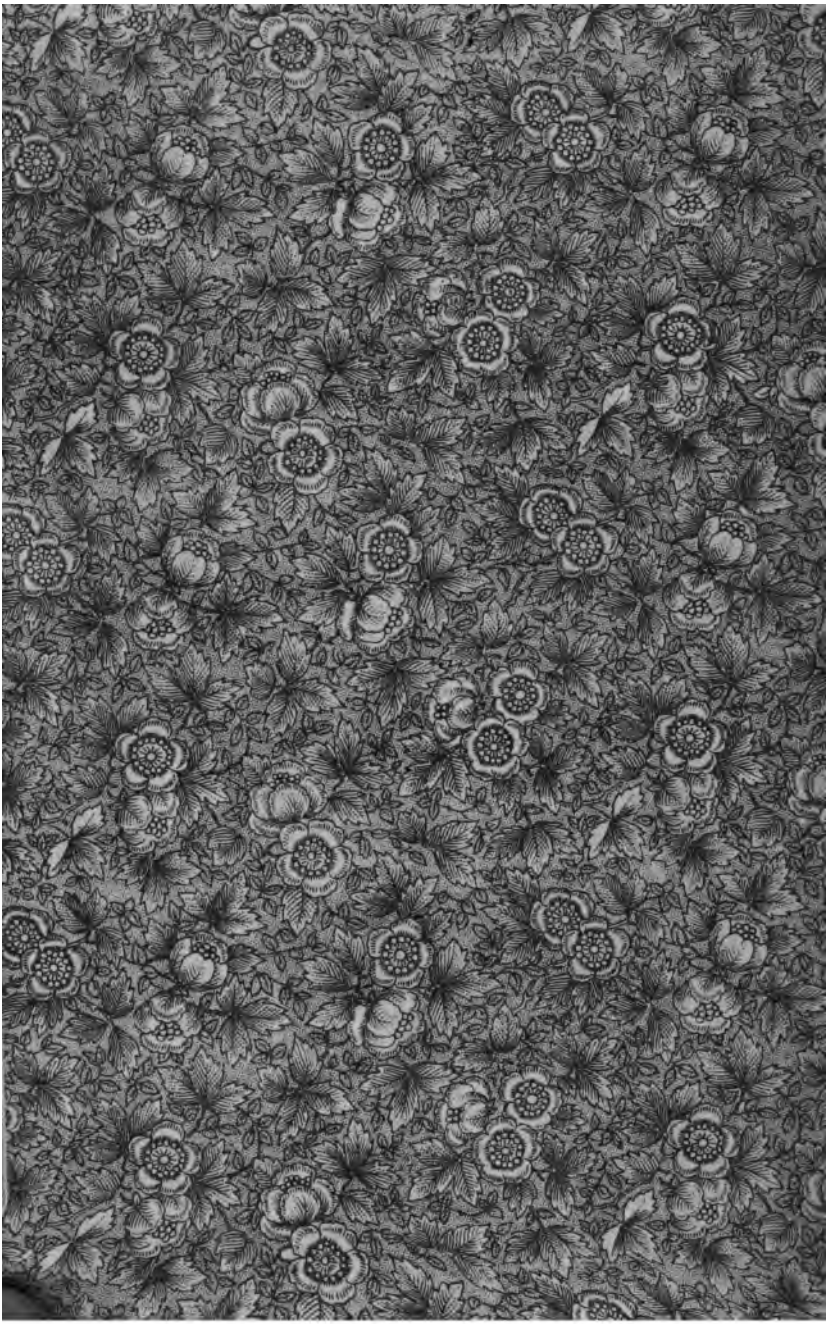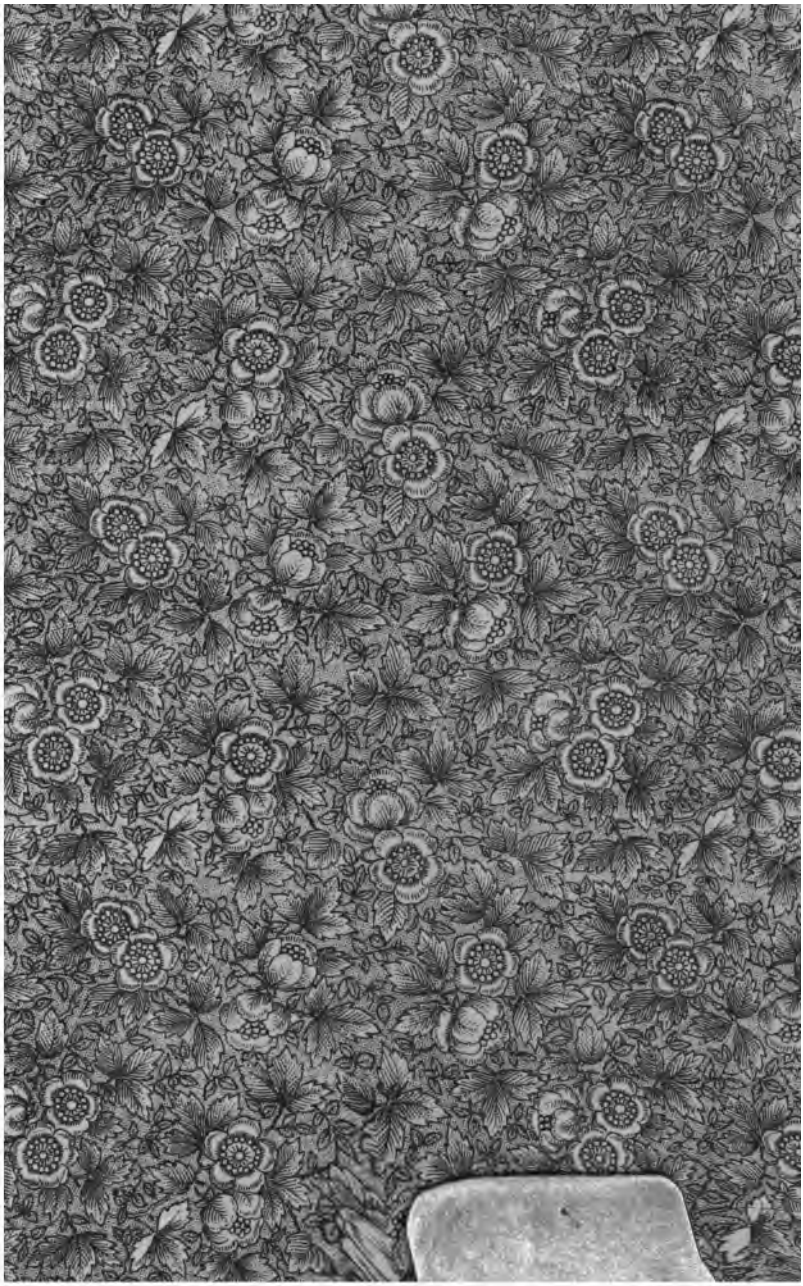
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